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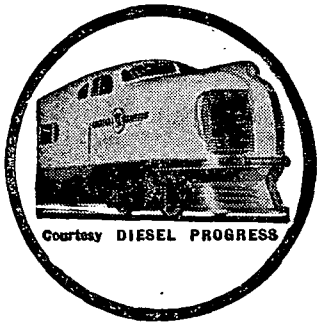

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Volume 273 CONTENTS FOR MAY 22, 1937 Number 2

All Noisy on the Spanish Front—*Novelet*.....Theodore Roscoe 4
The peace campaign that shook the world

In the Bag—*Short Short Story*.....Hugh B. Cave 30
The postman forgets to ring twice

Hocus Pocus—*First of three parts*.....Lester Dent 32
The white-haired boy of magic hits the sawdust trail

Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 56
Blackburn and Short—Heroes Against Odds

Red Snow at Darjeeling—*Second of six parts*.....L. G. Blochman 58
Conspiracy rides the Shimalghar express

Screwball—*Short Story*.....Richard Sale 79
Hold your hats, boys, Bickel's up at bat

Grand National—*Fourth of five parts*.....Judson P. Philips 91
Bad Bill takes the Transatlantic water jump

Smoke for Breakfast—*Short Story*.....Garvey Malone 109
It's a four-alarm blaze at 42 King

Galloping Gold—*Conclusion*.....W. C. Tuttle 119
Sheriff Henry hunts a ghost

Cricket Seeks Sponsor.....Albert George 90
New Air for Old Bottles.....Boris Vronsky 118
Page Daniel Boone.....Charles Dorman 141
Argonotes 142
Looking Ahead!..... 144

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

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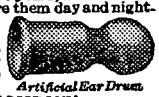

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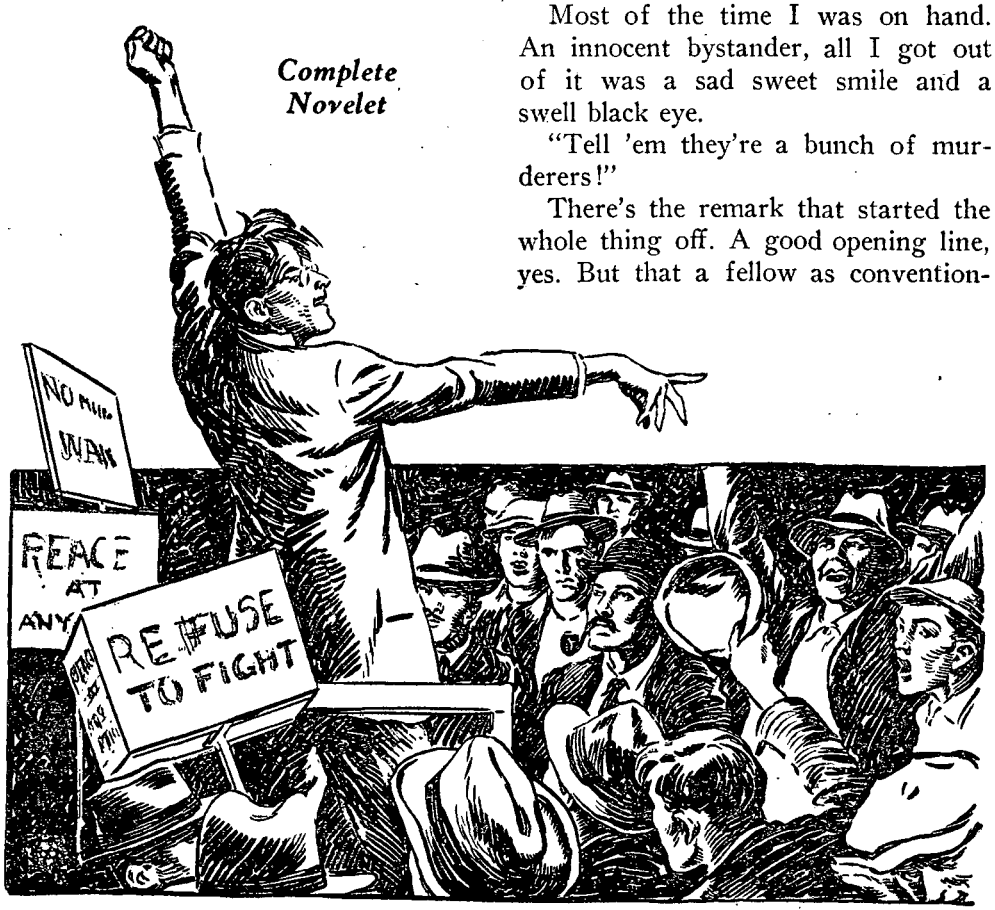
All Noisy on the Spanish Front

By THEODORE ROSCOE

I

WHAT really did happen there in Andorra? Who was Judson Stairway? And why? Reports were so garbled at the time, and much that was written so utterly fabulous. Now that the affair has had nine months to cool; now that the whole episode has been buried under the subsequent Spanish earthquake; now that the generals fight for front page space with love-nest cuties, and the bubble has blown away, and I've had time to think up fictitious names for the parties involved, perhaps it would be interesting to have the truth. I think it's a great story. The greatest story to come out of the Spanish Civil War. That it did not happen in Spain doesn't matter.

Complete Novelet



Most of the time I was on hand. An innocent bystander, all I got out of it was a sad sweet smile and a swell black eye.

"Tell 'em they're a bunch of murderers!"

There's the remark that started the whole thing off. A good opening line, yes. But that a fellow as convention-

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ally patterned as Judson Stairway should have taken it seriously, should have let it take him to that remote fly-speck country in the Pyrenees between France and Spain, never seemed written in the stars. At least, not in the forty-eight five-pointed stars spangling the banner we were sailing under that trip, or the sky that showed through the smoking room ports that night of the remark. That Year of Our Lord, 1935. Our ship, the S.S. *George Washington,* one day away from France. Andorra was as far away as Arcturus. And Judson Stairway, in his dinner jacket, nearsighted glasses, in a corner of the smoking room with a weak Tom Collins, had never even guessed there was such a country.

Even on shipboard he reminded me of lawn mowers, steam radiators and graham bread. The sort whose face sold for a dollar a dozen on every Main Street. Mild lips. Docile ears. Ordinary nose. Brown waves of hair ebbing a little from the shiny beach of his forehead. You could see he was out of his element this far from Akron, would rather be back in his office studying reports that said the insurance business was on the upturn. And he already had charts to prove it.

There were also charts which could prove that this vacation to Europe with Eunice and Eunice's aunt and a marriage—with Eunice—when they got back home would be Judson Stairway's last adventure, and a pretty dull one at that. Eunice was a sensible girl—as her aunt would fulsomely describe her, a "wholesome" girl—brownish-haired, speckle-blue eyed, freckled in season. Wore pink knitted sweaters and played the piano as if it were out of tune; never missed Easter at Brick Church and had once been fifth in a daisy chain. Her ideas of geography stopped with a real estate subdivision on the edge of an Ohio town; this trip to Paris was like a jaunt to the moon. Andorra? Well, a lot of people have never heard of the smallest country in the world.

For my own part, I was astounded to meet Judson and Eunice on a boat bound for France. For Eunice, you see, is a relative of mine.

"And you're going there, too, Cousin John?" Eunice trilled to me. "Isn't it a small world, meeting on this ship? Now you can show us Paris. Judson was going to Paris on business, you know, and Auntie and I decided to come along, and when Jud-

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son's old regiment found out they decided to have him represent them at the Society of French War Veterans dinner. It's on Bastille Day. The dinner. You know Judson's regiment was attached to the French during the War. He was a lieutenant. Well, and it seems the French are going to give him a medal. Isn't it thrilling?

And Judson Stairway was telling me about it again that last night out, when everybody was packed to go ashore in the morning, the voyage almost over, and we got together for a last drink at sea. "Yeah," he said, "I don't know what it's all about, but they're going to give me a medal of some kind for war service. I don't want it, but the boys back home said I had to go. It's a banquet this Society of French War Veterans is giving on Bastille Day. Day after tomorrow, that is." He flushed in proud embarrassment. "I got to make a speech."

Now it is just this sort of homely curtain-raiser line that is sure to produce a Cranshaw Drew on the stage. Drew was on shipboard, bound for London on some kind of literary deal. A book publisher. I'd known him in newspaper days before he acquired the Oxford accent and his hawk nose was photographed in all the smart magazines. Through a series of shrewd publishings he'd made enough money so he could afford to insult his friends and live in Europe. He came lounging into the smoking room that night, white tie and tails, whisky and soda in bored hand, in his elbow his latest success—an album of sensational World War photographs. His eyebrows gave a sniff at Judson Stairway as he paused beside our table.

"Did I hear you say you were making a speech to the Society of French War Veterans? They're giving you a medal?"

You can see him draw up a chair. Judson beaming at this familiarity from a celebrity. Eunice putting on the dog.

"My fiancé is going to make a speech in Paris." She patted her dry hair. "We thought Cousin John might give him some ideas for it, you see."

Judson was modest. "Well, Mr. Drew, I didn't want to do it, but these Frenchmen asked me. Gee, I can't make a speech to this Society of French War Veterans. I—I don't know what to say."

Drew nodded gravely. "Well, then, why don't you tell them they're a bunch of murderers!"

I STOPPED my rye highball on its way to my mouth, and glared at Cranshaw Drew. It was so annoyingly like the man, that remark. He had spoken it seriously across the lips of his whisky glass, but he couldn't help quirking an eyebrow at Judson Stairway. Judson's lips were open a little. He peered at Drew nearsightedly, decided it was all in fun, chuckled heavily.

"Tell 'em they're murderers?" He was eager to see the joke. "Those men at the Society of French War Veterans banquet?"

"Why not?" Drew's face was almost sincere. "You want to make a good speech, don't you? Then tell those ex-soldiers the truth. Something they'll remember. Tell 'em they are, to the last man, so many murderers."

Eunice, already hostile toward the Drew elegance, gave Judson's arm a little pat of ownership and maternal protection. She smiled stiffly. "Would you call Mr. Stairway a murderer, Mr. Drew?"

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Drew waved a slim hand. "Your fiancé was in the artillery, wasn't he? He fired a gun. He killed men."

"Yes, of course. But a murderer. Like these gangsters and—"

Drew's smile was indulgent. "Gangsters? Eh, but at most a criminal gunman might slay half a dozen men before he was sent to the chair. These guns in your battery, Mr. Stairway," —he pointed his cigarette—"let us presume you fired a sixteen-inch howitzer—a French seventy-five?—quite. Well, what is a gangster's sawed-off shotgun in comparison? The gangster, in all his career, kills only six men. Your seventy-five would slay that many with a single shell. In three hours' firing it might easily kill sixty men. In three days' firing it might have—possibly *did*—kill six hundred. And so? You are going to get a medal."

Judson Stairway smiled and peered. "Yeah. Sure, I suppose. But of course, that was war."

"War!" Drew peaked his eyebrows in pain. "Come now, Stairway. What is war but a lot of killing? And killers are murderers. The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill'—period; it doesn't say, 'Thou shalt not kill unless the colonel orders it,' nor 'Thou shalt not kill unless there's a war.' Soldiers are killers, therefore they are murderers. Yes, like gangsters. Only worse."

"Worse, Mr. Drew?"

"Absolutely." Drew tapped the table with a polished finger. "Not only because their weapons are more devastating—they're lower spiritually. Our gangster admits he's a criminal, makes no false pretenses to his soul about it, killing his enemies. The soldier? Struts off waving a flag, fights for some vague doctrine he hasn't taken the time to analyze, and claims the Almighty has given him a special dispensation to butcher his fellow man. He prays 'Peace on Earth' as he zippers his victim's belly open with a bayonet, and afterwards says he's sorry. You chaps in the artillery didn't even *see* the victims you killed, and you're not quite sure now why you killed them. Stairway, do you know *why* you went to war?"

"Well," Judson's nearsighted glasses were puzzled—he was still trying to see the joke—"I guess it was the sinking of the *Lusitania* that—"

"Ha!" Drew glared as if he saw the *Lusitania* in miniature sinking in the perspiration coming on Judson's forehead. "Let's see. There were one thousand, one hundred fifty lives lost on the *Lusitania*—right?"

"I—"

"But there were more than thirteen million casualties afterwards, in the war. So! You could sink the *Lusitania* once a day and every day for thirty years and you wouldn't equal the casualties lost in reprisal. Besides, the lads you killed afterwards didn't sink the *Lusitania*. Ever think of that, Stairway?"

Stairway had never thought of it.

"Ever think of the number of men just one of your shells—you were in charge of a battery, weren't you?—might have killed?"

Judson hadn't thought of that, either.

DREW'S pale eyes fixed Judson with a look of serious reproach. Pulling the volume of World War photographs from his elbow, he planked it on the table under Judson's nose, casually opened to a picture of a German soldier whose jaw had been shot off. "Ever see any of these Western Front photographs? The camera

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doesn't lie. Here's the real truth about war. . . ."

I'd seen Drew's album of photographs before—a grim and genuine record of the World War harvest—and I was annoyed. Nobody'd asked him the truth, and it was unnecessary for him to pop himself into the middle of our party and start harrowing my "country" cousins. Everyone realizes war is useless butchery; among his own crowd of highbrows Drew would have scorned such a discussion as stale. But here (I saw he saw) was virgin territory for his pinprick humor; he would have some fun with these small town lovebirds, this prim pink girl and complacent tourist. That was Drew. He liked to shock people.

I said, "Don't let him kid you, Judson—this is just a sales talk for his new book," and Drew gave me a reproachful look that was almost convincing. Judson didn't hear me. Snapshots of war's backwash, pictures of shattered landscapes, ruined church spires and contorted dead in ludicrous postures were swarming up at his spectacles. He turned a little greenish at a body in a trench without a head, and he made a sound in his throat at three legless corpses hanging in a mass of barbed wire. Dead horses piled in a bog . . .

"Is that—is that the work of shellfire?"

"No, Stairway, that's gas. The next picture is an example of shrapnel. Creeping barrage. Ever direct one?"

Those pictures would give anyone the gollywogs, and I hurried up a round of drinks, wishing Drew would go. But he was enjoying the expressions on Judson Stairway's face; he ordered a third round of scotch, and while Judson oggled through that picturebook of corpses, Drew began to talk of European intrigue, crooked diplomacy and the hypocrisy behind war.

"We thought we were saving the world for democracy. But weren't we, actually, saving big business investments in Europe? Did you know the steel combines let the War go on two extra years? Ever hear of the munitions scandals, the . . ."

I suppose the trouble was that Judson had never heard of such things at all. In Akron they must have libraries, but Judson read for what he called "amusement." As for the War, that had ended in 1918, a dream in an unreal past, something only recently remembered by this trip to France and an unexpected chance to make a speech. The War? His country had called; he had gone. Something about Belgium. All the other boys went, and they'd gone to kill an idea—militarism or something—not men who had arms and legs. You stood in a concrete dugout and shouted mathematics in a telephone. There'd been pretty girls and a parade back home and he'd done his duty . . .

"Yours not to reason why," Drew murmured.

Eunice fidgeted and wanted to go out on deck. What had started all this, anyway? Who wanted to look at those dreadful photographs the last night at sea and Paris ahead? "Come, Judson, let's go and dance in the—"

"I—I'll just finish looking at this book, Eunice. It's—"

Drew cheerfully ordered more drinks and kept on talking. At one o'clock Eunice went to bed mad. Judson didn't notice the gun-like slam of the starboard door as she went out; I know now the report was lost in the louder gunfire of his own exploding thoughts.

"Those burning houses! Set fire by *our* shells—"

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"Yes."

"The dead under that tree! Why, they're just boys and—"

"That's war for you, Stairway."

THERE must have been a thousand photographs in that book. The smoking room was badly ventilated; the hour was late; Drew kept talking and ordering drinks. Judson's forehead I saw was moist and green. At the time I thought it was alcohol. How was I to know he'd never seen a real dead man in his life—never even been to a funeral?

I've only given the highlights of what was said that evening, but as the whisky wore on Drew spread it thicker, and I dozed in an illustrated lecture on Armageddon, cheating diplomats, lying propaganda, the war that wasted millions of dollars and murdered millions of men. Drew could talk, too. Like an actor. Torturing the emotions of his audience and finally working his own emotions to fever pitch.

At four A.M. I woke up to see the smoking room otherwise deserted, Judson Stairway swallowing his last drink and staggering up out of his chair. "I see, Mr. Drew," he was saying. "I never thought of it before. There's no such thing as a righteous war, is there? Every side thinks it's defending itself. All that death and horror and destruction for—for nothing. But what—what can one do about it, then?"

"Do about it?" Drew burbled. "Nobody'll do anything about it. But we ought to refuse to fight, that's the answer. Refuse under any circumstances to kill. Look—" he pushed up from his chair and put out pleading hands to the empty room. "Suppose the first *poilu* had stood like this, open-handed, before the first Uhlan, crying, 'Kill me, friend!' Suppose you stood thus defenseless before your sword-waving enemy. The chances are he'd be ashamed to kill you, and if he did, what a cause you'd die for! Peace! Real peace! You wouldn't be a murderer just because he is. No, you'd be a martyr, a sacrifice to humanity. You wouldn't have on your conscience all those lives your cannon must have taken, the dead wantonly killed, the—"

"May I borrow this book of war photographs, Mr. Drew?"

"Keep it. Keep it, Stairway. And remember! The only answer is complete disarmament, absolute refusal to fight under any provocation, turn the other cheek, honest calling of a spade a spade. All soldiers are murderers—there is the honest truth." He sank back in his chair wearily, with a sad little shrug. "Good night, Stairway. Hope I haven't bored you. Good luck. I wish *I* could make that speech to those veterans for you . . ."

"Cranshaw Drew," I accused when Judson Stairway had gone, "you're a heartless Choctaw. Get your hooks in that poor devil, feed him full of liquor and bewilder him with ideas just to hear yourself talk. He drank in those photographs like whisky straights and crept out of here—did you see his face?—looking as if he were to blame for half the fatalities of the war."

Drew said, "If he was a good artilleryman, he is," and smiled as if he'd just eaten a canary. He lifted his eyebrows artfully. "Anyway, I wanted to see if that war book would make an impression. Y'know, John, I think that picture volume will sell . . ."

I went to bed worried about the look on Judson's face, but the farthest flight of imagination never brought to my mind Andorra. You know. That tiny country in the Pyrenees between France and Spain . . .

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In the morning, I saw Judson looking thin and yellowish; heard him tell Eunice he hadn't slept well. After we'd disembarked and were on the accommodation rattler to Paris, he sat staring out at the French countryside while Eunice's chatter bounced off him like the rain that bounced off the windows. France can be dingy as an old attic when it rains, and when we pulled into the Gare St. Lazare, Paris looked like Moscow. Funny how things go. If the sun had been shining on the boulevards —if we could have gone out for air, taken in the sights, seen a risqué review at the Moulin Rouge . . .

But we couldn't.

For the next two days the Paris weather was as foul as any in Siberia, and the entire city, including Judson, stayed indoors out of the storm. Rain fell like Noah's flood from a sky that blotted out the Eiffel Tower and wept down the chimneypots. It was gloomy. The second day I was sick of my hotel room, sick of American tourists—Judson and Eunice in particular, although I hadn't seen them—sick of France. I forgot it was Bastille Day. I forgot about Judson's speech to the Society of French War Veterans. I forgot the shipboard episode with Drew, and, I repeat, the country of Andorra was never in my thoughts. I spent that day in the hotel bar.

The following morning a lot of things were to come back into my aching head. I woke up with the door-knocker going like bedlam. I opened the door and Eunice rushed into my room as if the Old Harry were on her heels. Outside the Paris taxis were tooting joyously in fresh sunshine; the bad weather had passed. But I saw from one look at Eunice's face it was just beginning. She was wringing the morning paper in her hands.

"John! It's Judson! He's gone completely and totally mad—"

II

SHE had known ever since we landed in France, she told me, that something more than a headache was the matter with Judson. Rain or not, it was no reason for him to lock himself in his hotel room and refuse to see her or Auntie for the past two days. "I'm sick—I don't want anything!", that's all he would say. Then yesterday afternoon, yesterday when it had simply poured bucketsful, Judson had sneaked out of the hotel. Gone out walking by himself. Without his hat! As if it wasn't dangerous enough for an American to go poking alone around this foreign city—Eunice still thought of Paris as sewers full of Apaches—he might've caught his death of cold.

Finally, way after teatime (she'd tried to phone me all day) Judson had come back. Straggled into the hotel lobby, red of nose, soaked to the skin, circles under his eyes. No explanation. Told Eunice not to bother him, he had to get dressed for the veteran's banquet. No, he wasn't catching cold. He'd been walking, he said, and thinking.

And doubtless drinking, Eunice had told him. That glassy look in his eyes . . . But no, Judson had denied, talking and staring in the oddest way, he'd just been thinking. And now if Eunice would excuse him, he had to get dressed and go to that dinner . . .

When she came to the part about "that dinner" Eunice permitted tears to bud and travel down her freckled cheeks. She hadn't been able to see Judson or talk with him on this, the morning after; but here it was, all of it, in the morning paper. I, Cousin John, could see what Judson Stairway

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(and it was doubtless partly my fault!) had done. Two columns of news. There it was!

Well, Judson Stairway had made his speech to the Society of French War Veterans, no doubt about that! And he had called them murderers! Not only that, he had confessed himself a murderer, called every veteran at the banquet an assassin—"Of a far lower character, gentlemen, than the gunmen who admit themselves to be criminals"—and what was more, he had pronounced a French general, the toastmaster who'd introduced him as an ambassador of good will—he had called General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon a murderer!

Briefly, loudly and with simplicity, that was what Judson Stairway had done. Rising at the head of the table, forehead burnished, cowlick silhouetted against draped battle flags, he had started off with such a broadside as he'd never fired in all the War. I could just imagine the sound of his first words exploding in that historic banquet hall. He spoke French unusually well considering he hadn't used it since 1918; afterwards I found out that one of the things he'd been doing while locked in his hotel room those two days was brushing up his French.

"*Messieurs,* I am only going to say a few words. We—we are all ex-soldiers here—" picking at the studs in his shirtfront, eyeballs bulging with the effort, getting it out of his mouth like a hot potato—"and we are nothing but a lot of murderers!"

There! Murder was out! I would have given a winning sweepstakes ticket to have witnessed the scene. To have seen Judson Stairway delivering that unexpected address. Those French warriors, years out of the trenches, pleasantly pink from wining and dining, resigned in their chairs for oratory, suddenly aware that this American had said something. General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon, all medals and braid, his mouth open behind a lifted cigar. But then, ha ha. Those French faces relaxing, shrugs and chuckles, all smiling and putting elbows on table, all waiting—as Judson had once waited—to get the joke.

But Name of a Sacred Name—

"I was in the artillery, *messieurs.* I fired a big gun. A gangster with his pistol might slay half a dozen. I have killed that many men with a single shell. You will say that was war. *Messieurs,* I ask you! The Bible says 'Thou shalt not kill'—*period!* It does not say, 'Thou shalt not kill unless the colonel orders it!' or 'Thou shalt not kill unless there is a war!' "

Mon dieu! and what the devil! What is it that this wild-eyed American is saying? Somebody swears. All eyes are on Stairway.

But the ice had broken now, and the shock of first plunge was over. Frozen to his immortal skeleton (I could imagine) Judson could only go on swimming in that glacial speech. I could even picture him breasting the icy tide with some of Cranshaw Drew's gestures and scornful eyebrow lifts.

"Consider the *Lusitania! Messieurs,* we could sink a *Lusitania* every day for thirty years and not equal the deaths of those who were killed to avenge its sinking."

And—"Did we go to war to save Belgium, or to save the investments of big business?"

And—"Did you know certain steel combines tried to make the war last two years longer so that they could sell their munitions?"

And—"It was a lot of lying propaganda, crooked diplomacy, useless

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slaughter that accomplished nothing, nothing, nothing—"

SWEET Land of Liberty! If Judson Stairway didn't swim through the whole thing from beginning to end, through the munitions scandals and patriotic hypocrisy, the millions of wasted dollars and millions of dead, man's inhumanity to man, Drew's whole harangue word for word. And going hoarser by the word, but swimming through it all. Those French war veterans there to give him a medal must have listened with their jaws hanging like broken gates.

And finally, "I say there is no such thing as righteous or defensive war. But suppose the first *poilu* had stood defenseless before the first Uhlan, extending empty hands, saying, 'Kill me, friend!' He might have died, *messieurs,* but what a truly great cause to die for. Peace! Honest peace! I say the only answer is complete disarmament, absolute refusal to kill under any circumstances . . ."

Lord! But he ended up by declining any medal, yanking the book Drew had given him out from under his chair, slamming it down on the table where all could see. "Those dead men! Those shattered bodies! *Our* guns did that, too. Look at those photographs! The camera does not lie! There is the truth about war. All soldiers are murderers! Good night, *messieurs!*"

Judson Stairway had rushed from the hall with a sob, and General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon had rushed after him to stop him at the door. The word "madman" had drifted back into the thousand-ton silence at the flabbergasted banquet table; then was heard Judson's final salvo: "Report me to the government if you wish, *monsieur* general, but I will not retract a single word. What is more, I include you in the condemnation. You were a soldier like the rest of us. You are a murderer, too!"

Eunice wept down at the newspaper telling this amazing story.

"Good Lord!" I thought. But then I comforted her. "It's way back on the seventh page," I said. "In a week it'll be forgotten."

If I'd known—

YET it would have been forgotten if a certain fox-nosed Independent Press reporter hadn't happened to drop in on that banquet. Independent always goes for the sensational, and the smart correspondent saw a story right up the editors' alley.

AMERICAN DENOUNCES ALL SOLDIERS AS ASSASSINS. EX-SERVICE MAN WOULD REFUSE TO FIGHT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. CALLS GENERAL MONTFAUCON OF FRENCH ARMY A MURDERER.

It sizzled the wires of the Atlantic cable and made headlines in numerous American afternoon journals. More than headlines in Judson's home town. Somewhere the local boys acquired a photograph of Judson, one of those fat-cheeked halftones in the O.D. uniform of World War days, and the front page blurbed him in his soldier suit. The lads of his old regiment sent him a cablegram asking what the hell, and in two hours the story was copied by every paper in America.

AMERICAN REFUSES FRENCH DECORATION. CALLS GENERAL MURDERER.

You can see how the Paris press which had buried the story had to copy it back from the American releases; how the story would move up from seventh to third page in the French

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newspapers; how the French War Department would make a howl that had the newsboys yelling it next morning on the boulevards.

AMERICAN SOLDIER CALLS GENERAL MONTFAUCON ASSASSIN!

I spent a lively twenty-four hours trying to stave off reporters, calling up editors, running from Eunice's room—she and Auntie down with hysteria—to Judson's quarters where he sat wrapped in a blanket with his feet in a dishpan of hot water, shouting at one phone call after another, "No, I won't take back a word of it. Soldiers are murderers, murderers—"

I didn't waste any time having Judson's phone put out of order and telling him I'd be a murderer, myself, if he didn't put an end to this nonsense. But by that time, though I didn't know it then, it was far too late and we were, in a manner of speaking, on our way to Andorra. If you know anything about French politics you'll know they're just about as hysterical as a box of firecrackers on a hot stove, and back there in 1935 the situation in Europe was jumpy to say the least. France was balanced on a delicate poise between going Fascist or Communist, and this General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon—a leader of the Right and an advocate for heavy rearmaments—was right in the middle of the balance.

By the following morning it was clear that Judson's little after dinner speech to the Society of French War Veterans had become an address that was making headlines all over France. A Fascist deputy from Marseille said Judson was a rabble-rouser sneaked into the banquet by the Communists, and the Communists were crying out that he was a Fascist trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the people by making them think soldiers today were really pacifistic. Rastinax, the French radio commentator everybody was listening to in those days, quoted the speech in his daily broadcast from Paris. Rastinax finished with:

"Undoubtedly a great many Frenchmen were not happily surprised by the American's words. Did General Montfaucon have the face red?"

"On the radio!" Eunice screamed at me. "Judson's name was mentioned. Do you see the crowds in the street looking up at his window? There's a newsreel man out there. The hotel proprietor says we have to leave. Judson won't even answer his door this morning. Somebody's got to do something . . ."

YOU know the excitable French? Then you know the affair was quite out of hand by that time, quite out of Eunice's and certainly out of Judson's. General Montfaucon's face had been red, all right . . .

I took the elevator to Judson's room, forced the door when he didn't answer my knock. Nobody there . . . It gave me a fright because I was beginning to see Eunice's fiancé wasn't the sort to be on the loose. Without telling Eunice, I called the police to find out where Judson had skipped to.

Can you guess where the Paris *gendarmes* found him?

Late the night before, General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon had sent his seconds with the challenge, and our Judson had gone at five A.M. to a secluded spot in the Bois de Boulogne to see about the general's outraged honor. Pistols at dawn! Dueling is against the law in France, but they bootleg such meetings on occasion, and General Montfaucon of the French Army (my honor, *monsieur!*) was not

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to be called murderer with impunity. We found Judson, of course, in the hospital . . .

I'd have sold my soul to have seen that duel. The mist of early morning. The seconds pacing the dewy grass; the doctor with his sinister case of instruments; that purple-whiskered general scowling like a furnace. And Judson Stairway—I can imagine the first rays of sunlight touching his owlish glasses as he stumbled nearsightedly forward to choose his weapon from the pistol case—

Death? What was death to a man who had seen the handiwork of his own cannon; the thousands of mangled dead for whom his own hand might have been responsible? A man who'd seen the mathematical symbols of artillery lessons turn into smashed arms and legs? Who'd swallowed at one sudden gulp the awful casualty lists of the whole World War?

"You will take twenty paces, *messieurs,* turn and fire once."

And Judson threw down the weapon and stood there with empty hands. The general was too shaken with rage for the usual French marksmanship. The bullet went through Judson's upper arm clean as a piccolo hole, missing bones and arteries.

By lunchtime Judson was back in the hotel, pretty white around the gills, but apparently suffering nothing worse than a bad cold.

By two o'clock the American Diplomatic Corps had the French Diplomatic Corps on the telephone. By two-fifteen the War Department on the Seine was telling General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon to take a vacation and take it quick. By midafternoon the duel was on every lip in Paris, a radio station wanted to put Judson Stairway on the air, there was a fight among Leftists and Rightists in the Chamber of Deputies, the Republican Guard charged a mass meeting in Montparnasse, the garment workers went on a sympathy strike, some Royalists built a barricade somewhere, a crowd of intoxicated Blue Devils flung eight bricks through the windows of our hotel, a sailor was stabbed in an argument in Bordeaux, and the name of Judson Stairway was ringing across the *bistro* tables from Verdun to Avignon.

At dinner time Judson was in bed, unconscious from sleeping tablets taken to ease the pain in his arm. Eunice and Auntie were weeping tantrums in their rooms. I opened a cablegram from Judson's insurance company saying, "Fired." I saw an evening paper that said:

ALL FRANCE STIRRED BY AMERICAN'S SPEECH. PACIFIST REFUSES TO FIGHT AND INVOKES BIBLE COMMANDMENT. CALLS MONTFAUCON A MURDERER AND ALLOWS GENERAL TO SHOOT HIM THROUGH ARM. ARMY MEN ENRAGED. POLITICS INVOLVED. WOMEN STORM HOTEL TO SEE MARTYR.

I received a quiet phone call from the American Embassy. The speaker said: "We believe that, due to the delicate political situation, it would be advisable for Judson Stairway to leave France. Belgium, perhaps . . ."

I went up to Judson's room to tell him about it. His bed was empty and his suitcase gone. That night the police couldn't find a trace of him.

III

ANDORRA? Patience. It is not easy to reach that tiny independent republic (pop. 5,000) which is perched like an eagle's nest in the mountains between France and Spain.

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The road there is circumforaneous and roundabout, as high of endeavor and as difficult in attainment as the Road to Heaven, and as beset along the way. According to my memory book the route went through half the capitals of Europe and took a year. London, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Berlin, Helsingfors, Moscow, Budapest, Vienna, Bern—a trail through back halls and alleys, an itinerary through a maze of trapdoors and railroad stations and police stations such as would have driven a Cook's Tour Agent—and almost drove me—to suicide.

"When Judson ran away . . ." That is how Eunice still describes it, which shows that no matter how far some women travel, their comprehension never gets much beyond the outline of their feminine heads. Judson ran away? Well, then, so did Saint George run away when he set out single handed to conquer the dragon. So did Buddha run away when he left his wife and kingdom and started across Asia to teach humanity the Light. So did the Prophets, the Apostles, the Crusaders run away . . .

AMERICAN DUEL-MARTYR FOUND IN LONDON. TELLS CROWDS NO EXCUSE FOR ANY WAR. PREACHES LOVE YOUR ENEMIES TO THRONG IN HYDE PARK.

The English know how to deal with things like that. Hyde Park. Go there and set up your soapbox and talk your head off about anything you want, and the police won't bother you except by yawning. A safety valve where all the cranks and anti-whatnots and spellbinders can let off steam.

When Eunice and I got there, following the trail by the newspaper, Judson was on his soapbox, eyes shining, cheeks feverish. Can you see him there in the torchlight—Drew's book uplifted in one ministerial hand, posed like Moses confronting the mob with the Tables of Stone? "Here's the truth about war! See these corpses? It's murder, wholesale murder!"

"Yah," a heckler in the audience was calling. "But wot if y're attacked by some blighter? Wot if some bleedin' enemy jumps onto you?"

"Will you be a murderer because the other man is? No, no! Refuse to fight! Turn the other cheek! If the Bible means anything to you—"

"But suppose 'ee attacks yer wife an' kids—"

"He will not attack unless he thinks you were going to attack *his* wife and children first. All men are good at heart. If we put down our guns—"

What attacked Judson right then was Eunice's voice shrilling for him to "come right down off that box, we're taking the next boat home."

I won't forget the scene that night in that dumpy London hotel. Eunice pleading, weeping, stamping, letting down her hair. Me bellowing: "Damn it, man, you can't start out trying to save the world!" Judson, sitting like a rock, staring at nothingness, murmuring, "Somebody must do something. Somebody must tell the truth. All those dead men. I, too, was responsible. Somebody must make them *see,* before it happens all over again."

"But you can't go on like this. Your arm . . . And what about our home, our marriage, what about *me!*" Eunice would bring it down to that.

Poor Eunice! When you think of all the Crusaders who buckled on their armor and left home without bothering to say goodbye. No wonder Judson couldn't argue; couldn't explain. He crept out that night and took a plane for Holland.

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After all, you can't lock a man in his room. Not when he's free, white and under forty, and out to save the world.

CROWDS RIOT IN AMSTERDAM HALL WHEN AMERICAN CRIES FOR PEACE. BEGS SOLDIERS TO LAY DOWN ALL GUNS. DUTCH AIR OFFICE PROTESTS SPEECH.

That was in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant,* but he left Holland without giving them a forwarding address, and we had to wait for him to turn up in the *Copenhagen Aftenbladet.*

FANATIC CALLS ON KING TO DISBAND ARMY. CAUSES ROW IN DENMARK.

WE got to Copenhagen about the time he reached Helsingfors, and we reached Helsingfors about the time he arrived in Berlin. Why did I chase him? You don't know my Cousin Eunice. You never listened, late at night in some sidetracked railway depot, to her screaming, "We've got to stop him! He's mad! We can't let him go on like this! It's all your fault for introducing him to that terrible man on board that ship!" You don't know any woman who feels she's been jilted and sets out to recapture the man who jilted her.

I had two Crusaders on my hands that dreary winter. Judson Stairway out to save the world, and Eunice out to save Judson Stairway. As a kid did you ever play "slopes," chase a trail of torn-up paper around the woods? It was like that. We chased headlines. Only never play it with a girl who has hysterics every mile and who knows how to faint every time you want to quit. I don't wonder Judson took to ducking down the alleyways and dodging from the back doors. If he'd seen the expression on Eunice's freckled face coming after him—

She wasn't the only one after him by that time, either. You can't go around a powder mill like Europe throwing the cold water of truth like that. In Europe, these days, truth is against the law. Besides, there's a point where reason becomes dangerous. If soldiers threw down their guns a lot of gunsmiths would go out of business, United Tombstones would drop below par, and 872 diplomats would be looking for work. *Heil, Hitler!*

In Berlin the police jailed Judson on some claptrap Communist charge, and the American consul sweat gin in the effort to save Judson's head. We weren't allowed to see him in the prison, and a month in solitary confinement was all he needed to cement his resolve and turn him into a nonstop Messiah. Persecution—the final forge to the reformer's sword. Figure the power that was in the man when I tell you he pried the bars of that Berlin hoosegow and escaped from Hitler's *Gestapo.* Onward to Sweden!

Some cadets gave him a shower of beer bottles in Stockholm; a tramp freighter got him to Esthonia. Esthonia bounced him to Russia where he talked for almost three minutes on a Moscow street corner before Stalin saw he was a spy of Trotzky's and kicked him over the border to Poland. It was February by then; Eunice and I, following the trail through a maze of Muscovite red tape and blinding Slavic blizzards used to wonder how Judson kept alive. His money must have long since petered out, and his shoes. He was walking from village to village in that frozen waste, stopping only long enough in each place to cry, "Throw down your guns!" and be shoved on by the police. He was limping, now, and ragged, and

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he wore a scarecrow's beard. Eunice worried about his underwear. But I could understand what the frontier guard meant when he told us: "It was a night below zero when he came in here with snow in his pockets and toes poking from his boots, but you saw he could not freeze to death because his eyes were keeping him warm . . ."

Brrrrrr—you are thinking Andorra with its olive trees and liquid guitars must be a long long way from that icy sentry box on the Russo-Polish frontier. But it won't be long now. Judson Stairway, somewhere in Poland, was joined by the first little band of converts to his Never-Carry-A-Gun Society.

That same month, somewhere in France, a bandit named El Lobo—The Wolf—broke jail and decided to return to his native lair in the Pyrenees.

Somewhere in Spain a general named Franco, a Jesuit named Gil Robles, and agents from those gay blades, Hitler and Mussolini, were plotting to overthrow the republic's government in Madrid.

I got a wire from London:

MY SPEECH SEEMS STILL GOING OVER BIG STOP BOOK SELLING NICELY CRANSHAW DREW

On a main street in Warsaw, Eunice was hit by a motorcycle.

And in a back room, not two blocks away, Judson was meeting Al Ritter.

AS I put it on paper it occurs to me that Ritter might easily have been an agent of Drew's; I wouldn't put his sense of humor past any duplicity.

Ritter (Al to you, Pal) was the high-pressure publicity boy to a caricature—too utterly the part to be believed. His hair was orange. He wore brown derbies and suits striped like watermelons. He was as blatant as a carnival midway and as full of ideas as a monkey cage. He didn't give a damn about peace, in fact spent his waking hours in such a hotcha of mental hurricanes as would have ruptured the brain of any ordinary lunatic; but he knew a Barnum project when he spotted one, and I could picture him grabbing hold of Judson and Judson's exiled followers, and saying, "Boys, for a hunnerd a week I'll really put this no-gun racket across.

"First we gotta get contributions. Stairway, you gotta shear off the whiskers—no, leave on the beard, but trim it. Then we get a name. Slogans. Blurbs. Line up a lecture tour—none of this pitchstand stuff—halls! After the money starts comin' in we'll plaster Europe with posters, distribute literchoor—that's what we'll do—*literchoor!*"

"Why, yes. Uh—yes. I need help like yours, Mr. Ritter . . ."

I'll say this for Ritter. Agent or not of Drew's, at least he was honest. The contributions didn't go for Irish whisky. It was Ritter who organized the "society" into a "movement," who thought up the White Shirts. Who made the "band" into "The Unarmed Pilgrims." Who titled Judson "The Ambassador of Peace." It was Ritter who brought Judson's odyssey out of the underground rabbit-holes where poverty and the police had driven it by now, and brightened it with headlines again.

Born then were those posters to be emblazoned across Europe from Belgium to the Balkans—*War Is Hell!* That was the season when some queer little man with an umbrella was liable to sneak up behind you and slap a sticker on your back—*Don't Fight!* If you were on the Continent that spring

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of 1936 you undoubtedly saw that billboard of Judson Stairway, empty hands outstretched, white shirt open at the throat, face lifted to the dawn, standing so before a Death's-Head Hussar who aimed an ashamed pistol at the passionless forehead of his unarmed friend. It was captioned—*Put Down That Gun!*

In Prague, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia—Ritter hired the halls and led the singing—they packed them in. Ritter booked the Opera House in Vienna, hired the National Theatre in Bern. The slogan: *Books Instead of Bullets* was Ritter's.

But only Judson Stairway could have conceived of that *Peace Pilgrimage to Spain!*

Spain . . . Well, it's an established fact that when you raise an army you can't let it stand idle. What an army needs is action, something to give it confidence, something to test its mettle, a victory or two to prove its purpose. To keep from going stale an army, you might say, must be used—whether it's an army of Peace Pilgrims or an army of Spanish rebels.

July was on us. *Arriba España!* Down with Madrid! Up Franco!

REBELS ATTACK CAPITOL! LOYALISTS FIGHT TO SAVE REPUBLIC! ALCAZAR BESIEGED! THOUSANDS SLAIN AS CIVIL WAR FLAMES ACROSS SPAIN!

Minor headlines:

Ambassador Of Peace To Lead Goodwill Caravan To War-Torn Peninsula. Anti-War Books to Be Distributed. One Hundred Thousand Volumes of World War Photographs and Fifty Thousand Hymn Books to Be Passed among Spanish Combatants. Says Judson Stairway: "The Time Has Come for Action. I, Myself, Will Lead the Vanguard; Unarmed We Will Go to the Battlefield of This Unfortunate Land Where Misguided Men Water the Soil with Their Blood. Twenty Truckloads of Books Will Be Distributed among These Battling Brothers. Let Every Warrior Discard His Rifle and Read the Truth. Forward, Peace Pilgrims"!

Sub-headline:

Twenty Truckloads of Books to Leave Switzerland Passing Through France into Spain by Way of Andorra.

I was on my way to take Eunice home from the Warsaw Good Sisters Hospital when I read those items in English newspapers that were two weeks old. Three months in Poland playing nursemaid to the accident victim girl friend of a wandering world-saver (Auntie had long since gone home) had just about done me up; and I thanked God I had the tickets to America in my pocket.

Ha ha. One glance at her face when I met Eunice in the hospital lobby told me I could tear up the tickets. I'd like to have got my hands on the interne who gave her that English newspaper.

"John, we've got to stop him! This time we've *got* to stop him!"

You'd have thought that bump with a speeding motorcycle would have knocked Judson Stairway out of her. Not a bit of it. Three months in a lonely foreign hospital had hardened her determination as confinement under Hitler had hardened Judson's. Her jaw had healed into a rock. Her lips were thin.

"And he needs me now! He's in danger—real danger! If I can't stop him, any way—I'll go with him! Whether you come or not, I'm going!"

WE went. By plane to Paris, and then in a hired Renault-16, Eunice driving. Whew!

The car radio picked up a news-item broadcast from Avignon. Judson's caravan had just gone through.

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"It was an odd sight, listeners-in!" the broadcast said. "Those twenty trucks lined up with their white flags flying—*Don't Fight* and *Books Instead Of Bullets* painted on the hoods —twenty White Shirted volunteer truck drivers anxious to push on. Off to the war, folks, and their leader boasting there isn't a single gun or weapon of any kind among them; the first truck carrying a box of doves. Yes, the Peace Pilgrims ought to reach Andorra by tomorrow night, and then—"

Eunice held the gas to the floor. Lordy! The Pilgrims were only five hours ahead of us when we raced through Toulouse, and we could see the tire-tracks of those trucks when we hit the highway into the Pyrenees. Spain just beyond . . . Clinging to the door of our swaying sedan, I wanted to wring the sarcastic necks of the French officials who'd given Judson passports to go through.

French statesmen, of course, being French statesmen . . . Naturally there was someone in the State Department who remembered the Bastille Day incident and figured it might be a good thing for this fellow to reach Spain. And what would you, when one could not have stopped him anyway? The American, not so? was mad.

Which was also the comment of Captain Alejandro Escobedo, head of the Guardia Civil on the frontier of mountainous Andorra. He gazed at our special passports—bribed from the harried French authorities by Eunice at the price of more hysterics—and glared at our travel-stained car in astonishment.

"*Madre de Dios!* Two more Americans who wish to go into the danger zone! Bones of five thousand saints! has the Independent Republic of Andorra become a highway for all the maniacs in creation? The *señorita* wishes to catch up with the American who is taking twenty trucks of books God knows where? But he is mad, that one—*loco*—a lunatic! Listen . . ."

Captain Alejandro Escobedo puffed his cheeks and waved his arms in the mountain twilight. "This morning comes this fleet of trucks heading for Spain. I say, is a war going on in Spain or a circus? I stop these drivers, *Alto!* Who goes there, please, and why? Stands to the fore this individual, this American with a beard like a Bible and great owlish spectacles on his nose. Passports he produces of which I can make neither head nor tail save this parade of lorries may go through Andorra for Spain. But what do you think is painted on those trucks? In Spanish the words, *Do Not Fight.* Only that is not all—"

Captain Escobedo combed his bald head with wild fingers. "I tell this American, 'It is dangerous in the hills of Andorra at night. Have you means of defense?' He stares at me as if I had insulted his paternal grandmother. 'Not a gun among us or any weapon,' says he. 'But Spain is a tornado of bullets,' I tell him, 'and these Andorran mountain passes are as dangerous with *bandidos.* This war has disrupted our police. There is that villainous guerilla band led by that raider from hell, El Lobo! To go on at night in Andorra is like walking into a nest of wild tigers!'

"So I draw my pistol to illustrate the danger. *Tu Madre!* if this Yankee maniac does not shove a book in my hand. What is it? Photographs of dead soldiers! He orders me to throw down my gun. Orders *me!* But there is more. If he did not then call me, Captain Alejandro Escobedo, whose record is a

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byword for honor and discipline in the Andorran Guards, whose character has never before been impeached—if he did not call me a *murderer*—"

The little Andorran's eyes bulged as he sputtered this recital, but they almost popped out when Eunice delivered her five cents' worth.

"Quick! Which way did he go! You must help us catch him—"

"*Ya lo creo!* I should leave my post and go chasing after a madman? This is the Andorran Frontier Office, *señorita!* Beyond our borders in Spain there are snipers, danger! In our own hills there are these bandits! Go at night without reinforcements? Do you think I want my throat cut by that El Lobo?"

Did that give Eunice an instant's pause? . . . She declared:

"Then we'll go alone! Come, John—"

I couldn't stop her. My own sanity was wavering; long since she had mesmerized my will power. We roared out of that fly-speck frontier station at sunset, while the barefoot Andorran guards and their popeyed captain stood like toy soldiers in the dust and bid us *adios* with their mouths open.

Nightfall pinned a blue veil of dusk across the Pyrenees. Andorra may be the smallest country in the world, but her mountains don't look it. The car climbed and wound in a majestic twilight. Judson was just ahead—Eunice dinned that in my ears as she burned up the gas. Judson was just ahead in that vista of forested peaks, and we had to reach him before he reached Spain.

El Lobo was up ahead, too. El Lobo —The Wolf . . . His personal introduction to this story I can only construct now from imagination and subsequent happenings . . .

IV

EL LOBO had his namesake's hungry underlip and a similar ferocity in his soul. Also he had a hump on his spine, a beard as foul as a restaurant mop, a milky cataract over his left eye. His was as dirty, depraved and dangerous a gang of guerillas as ever huddled together under a mountain moon, and most dangerous of the brood was El Lobo himself.

But what good is a wolf without fangs? Here was a wolf to conjure with, leader of the finest pack of wolves in creation, possessed of a perfect hideout (what policeman in Andorra would dare approach this ruined castle on a mountain-top known to be haunted?)—a perfect set-up, and no teeth!

For bandits can't live off knives—not in a land where every mountaineer now carries a gun. Not on the borders of a country where there are a million guns. With that Civil War in Spain, guns everywhere were at a premium. Bullets cost like diamonds. *Alma de Dios!* El Lobo's trusty pistol had been wrenched from him by those rascally French police in the north. His men, while he was in jail, had long since run out of bullets. His sole remaining weapon, purchased at the cost of a Jewish pawnbroker's life, was a rusty old Nagant carbine with only two bullets for the barrel—a museum piece of a musket that looked as if it hadn't been fired since the Napoleonic Wars. The only gun in the pack, and El Lobo must preserve it for discipline. A gaunt, lean season it had been for El Lobo and his wolves.

But tonight—heaven be praised! A windfall such as no bandit would dare have dreamed!

Crouching atop a tower of his ruined

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castle, El Lobo scratched a carbuncular ankle with his musket-barrel while his good ēye blazed star-like off through the mountain vastness—focused like a telescope on a lazy column of dust that was crawling in the twilight up a mountain road.

"And is it true, Pedro my good one, that these truck drivers have not among them a single firearm?"

Pedro, who was nobody's good one, could only pant and wave his hands, for he had ridden all afternoon by roundabout road, and ridden hard.

"But it is true!" Pedro blared. "I was in the Customs House this morning when they came over the frontier from France."

"These are not volunteers for the Spanish, then?"

"*Por Dios!* Rather some new religious party that preaches against killing and cries 'Never Fight!' and goes to war without weapons."

"Not one gun or pistol? No machine guns, bombs or swords?"

"Only much rich baggage concealed under canvas coverings. Much provision, by the looks. Very valuable."

"Santa Maria be praised!" sang El Lobo in his rich contralto. "Go quickly to the patio, Pedro! Bid each man sharpen his knife and coil his rope. Round up the horses in the corral. At midnight we go to greet this *Americano* who poaches thus boldly on my territory. Together we go to greet him, Pedro—you and The Wolf—"

I WISH I could describe the daze in Judson Stairway's glasses when they first focused on that pair. They'd been dazed enough, two minutes before that, when they caught sight of Eunice and me. We'd come up on the trucks, parked for the night at the roadside, and found Judson standing in the doorway of his tent, staring off at the moonlit mountains beyond as a Crusader might have stared at the foothills owned by the Turks.

I wonder if Judson, now the test was at hand, Spain closing in, the safe outposts of France shut behind him like a door—I wonder if Judson, that night in the Pyrenees wilds, wasn't having his first qualms? Street corner preaching, pitting his bright faith against the rotten eggs of scoffers and stupidity of police, had been one thing. Heading an expedition, leading an organized movement was another. The petty dissensions of the march. The warnings and rolling eyeballs of the authorities. Uneasy glances of the volunteer truck drivers as they chugged deeper and deeper into this mountainous limberlost. Nerves developing. Someone suggesting they post a guard. Anxious questions to be answered, loosening faiths to be bolstered; everybody hugging the campfire. It had all seemed so simple, so pure and simple at first.

Certainly the Spanish War, as seen from the heights of Andorra, was a disillusionment. No thundering panorama of battlefields smothered in shellfire, no charging squadrons of tanks, no shattered labyrinths of barbed wire, trenches, ruined towns. This northwest corner of Spain seemed the only peaceful prospect his eyes had encountered since his leaving Ohio. Instead of a landscape ravaged by flames, here were crags of natural rock, deep valleys soaked in moonlight, cliffs overgrown with forest, a road that climbed off through emptiness, a mountain silence lonely and depressing as an owl-hoot. The only ruin in sight was a medieval castle on a clifftop off to the left. Somewhere a wolf howled.

I wonder if Judson, sharing his tent with Mr. Al Ritter's twitchings, gab-

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bings and cigarette butts, hadn't been thinking of home and Eunice. If, instead of listening to Mr. Ritter's dynamic chatter he hadn't been gazing a bit wistfully across that lonesome summer night moonscape where the only evidence of war was in the eternal erosion of time, and, judging from the silence to the south, the Spanish upheaval was only a rumor . . .

Eunice skidded our car to a halt, jumped out, ran forward with hair in her eyes. "Oh, Judson . . . Judson . . . Thank God, we've got here in time!"

He wore fawn-colored riding breeches and white silk shirt open at the throat, and I recognized him from the posters I'd seen—save the Vandyke wasn't quite so lush and there were tired cones under his cheekbones. He'd lost a lot of flesh in a year at world saving. He stared at Eunice as if he didn't recognize her.

I shuffled toward him, saying, "Be human, Judd. She's just out of the hospital."

Judson came out of the trance and gulped, "Eunice!" glassily, and then went back into the trance, staring goggle-eyed at the moonlight behind me. There was a spatter of hoofbeats on the road as I turned, and somewhere a man gave a yell, and the next thing I knew there were horsemen all around us in the night and two leering ragamuffins were coming out of some ilex bushes near the tent.

One was skinny as a skeleton in a wrapping of crumbling mummy rags.

But if this one seemed no bargain for looks, no dashing *caballero,* he was as nothing beside the other.

The other was bloaty and humpbacked, a sort of human toadstool under a battered sombrero, wearing a beard like a restaurant mop and with a milky cataracted eye.

"UP with the hands, *señores. Con cuidado!* No tricks! This cavalcade is surrounded by my followers who are legion. Have you not heard of El Lobo, master of this mountain pass, leader of brave *bandidos?* Have you not been told of The Wolf, whose slightest whim is a command, whose very name sends all of Andorra into hiding? Gold we demand, *señores.* Much gold for the safe conduct of this cavalcade which has trespassed on the territory of The Wolf!"

Judson gasped, "Wolf—" looking unhappy with his beard.

Eunice threw frightened arms about Judson's neck.

"Make no move," came the command. "We know you are unarmed."

I saw the one-eyed toadstool was pointing a sort of rifle, an antiquated fowling-piece that looked as crippled and moth-eaten as One-Eye himself. I put up my hands. Ritter popped out of the tent in lilac pajamas and yelled, "Whaa—"

"Stand where you are, *señor.* El Lobo demands your gold!"

You can imagine the moony roundness of Judson's glasses glaring across Eunice's hair at those two pariahs.

There was a muffled sound of yelling and scuffling down the line of parked trucks. Judson blurted: "Gold? We haven't any gold! And you know we don't carry arms. Put down that gun! If I could just speak with this El Lobo —tell him we didn't mean to trespass—talk to him about our—"

"El Lobo," said the one-eyed humpback proudly, "stands before you. It will be useless for you to fight, *americano.* You observe my gun!"

"But you can't mean—I tell you, we bring peace! Peace!"

Pedro, chuckling, smiling shyly as he fingered a knife, had to put in the

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one English word he knew: "Surrender!"

"But you can't do this!" Judson shouted. "We are the Pilgrims of Peace, come open-handed with a message of fellowship—brotherly love . . ."

"Love," nodded El Lobo cheerfully, blinking at Eunice. "But the gold in those trucks when you hand it over will assure your safe conduct. I mean, for the *señorita* too."

I got the meaning of that, all right, and I saw the sweat of understanding come to Judson Stairway's forehead, and I heard a gulp from Ritter. I made an involuntary step toward the toadstool-man, and there was that gun pointing at me, and Pedro smiling shyly with his knife. Meanwhile there were a lot of highjinks going on down the line of trucks; bandits seemed to be everywhere, and I could hear someone knocking things around in Judson's tent.

I was trying to think up something to say when a big pirate with a face like an overripe fruit came charging out of the shadows, his arms filled with books. He was followed by a ragged little squirt with a crate of doves on his shoulder—who was followed by another pirate with an armload of books. Books, books, books! I wish Drew could have been there to hear the literary criticism on that album of war photographs, then!

A torrent of words broke loose around El Lobo. Cries of disappointment. Jabbers. Oaths of dismay. A light cream came to the mouth of El Lobo. The Wolf gave a howl of rage.

"So!" he screamed at the moon. "Books, is it, *amigos?* Nothing in all these motor trucks but books! Books and a crate of pigeons! Did you think to fill the coffers of El Lobo with that? *Diez diablos!* No!" he squalled at Judson. "El Lobo will see about getting from you some honest *americano* gold—"

He gave a shriek at his men. They were on top of us before we could budge. Pinning our arms, trussing us with stinging rope. Those Andorran brigands knew their technique.

Before you could say Jack Sprat, even as the volunteer truck drivers had been tied to the tail-lights, we were bound and hogtied and standing as helpless as tenpins, in the door of that ruined tent. Judson, Ritter and me—Pedro bound us hand and foot to the tent-pole, and the ropes were like steel bands holding me.

Eunice . . .?

There was a rush of little brown horses in the moonlight. Eunice was lifted bodily, flung across a saddle. El Lobo mounted like a cat. Curveting, he leaned down, put his eye close to Judson's paralyzed face.

"Gold I want, *americano!* Fifty thousand dollars in gold to be delivered in one week to such a rendezvous as my messenger shall assign. Tomorrow a letter will be sent to the headquarters of the Andorran Guardia giving you further directions. Fifty thousand dollars of gold in one week, *señor,* or you will never see the *señorita* again!"

He chucked Judson under the chin with the rusty musket muzzle for emphasis, and he signed his ultimatum with an old Andorran custom. *Pfit!* Squarely and truly he launched a glistening streak of tobacco juice that made a round brown *smack!* on Judson's unprotected breast.

The horses bunched and went. Fading down the road . . .

Eunice's cries came wailing back in dusty moonlight. "Help me, Judson . . . Oooh, help meeeee—"

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V

IT seemed a year before any of us moved. Even if we could have moved we wouldn't have been able to. From the corner of my eye I could see Judson Stairway's face. Can you imagine a statue sweating? Staring at the road where the horsemen had been, then staring down at a rank brown streak on his chest, then staring back at the road again. Sweating. Then a slow red flame beginning to crawl up the plaster of his cheeks . . .

Well, I suppose at worst Judson Stairway had expected a Spaniard of the Hollywood kidney, a dashing Valentino on a stallion with tossing cloak and bright *bandolera,* all swords and suavity with a rose behind his ear. I suppose his imagination had wanted the military Japanese, or some cunning War Lord in the trappings of Unter den Linden. It was one thing to martyr yourself before a Prussian Hussar or an Italian *Generalissimo* who might have a brain for repentance. But this demented ruffian—this flea-bitten monstrosity—this leperish small-time brigand with an out-dated popgun—this bleary and spitting shadow that had fallen across the clear white light of world peace . . .

The red reached Judson's eyeballs, and his whole face took fire. His glasses were the doors to a furnace. His mouth breathed brimstone heat. His jaws clenched like tongs; bars of steel ribbed his throat. His shirtsleeves all but split up the sides; his shoulders swelled.

I can hear him panting yet—*"Uh-huh—Uh-huh-Uh—!"* —and I can almost feel the agony of muscles straining ropes, the agony that must have been like the searing convulsion in his soul. Ropes? What were ropes to a man who had broken from one of Hitler's jails? To a man who had walked across the Continent of Europe after an idea? Literally, he broke those knots. . . .

Three things he said before we got under way.

As he tore his wrists from their lashings and set to tearing the ropes from Ritter and me: "You say she was just out of the hospital, John—just out of the hospital?"

As he kicked the red-headed Ritter into action: "Untie the first truckman and tell him to drive like hell back to that French frontier station and bring back Captain Escobedo!"

As we darted down the line of trucks, releasing one after another those overwhelmed White Shirt volunteers: "Into those trucks and follow me! We're going after them!"

One scene I will remember the rest of my life is that line of trucks waking up like a picket line of wild elephants, motors roaring, drivers shouting; great mechanical pachyderms with their canvas-covered backs, their fluttering circus flags (*Don't Fight,* and *Books Instead of Bullets*), their wheeling yellow eyes, their rumbling bulk—snorting and turning and lining up in blue clouds of gasoline fumes on the road.

Another scene is of Judson, Ritter and me crammed into that jolting driver's seat, Judson at the wheel, Ritter hanging to the dash, me hanging for dear life to Ritter, the landscape going by in the moonshine like green soup. Downhill . . . uphill . . . banking around curves . . . slewing on sharp turns . . . following the road where those horsemen had gone.

"Judd," I screamed. "Slow down! Wow!"

He didn't hear me. His face, in the

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gaseous gloom of our narrow cab, was like something in rock and his glasses were headlights brighter than those of the truck, sweeping the shadows from the moon-surfaced road. For five miles that mountain road was like a roller-coaster track, dropping steeply into black chasm on one side, walled by sheer cliff on the other. There were no side roads, no clefts in the precipice, no turnings where those horsemen could have ducked. Figuring the time it had taken us to get loose and break camp, those riders must have had a half hour's start. At the speed we were going, if Judson didn't jump the cliff, we ought to overtake them any minute now. . . .

Then Judson slammed the brakes. There was a screaming of hot brake-bands down the line behind us. Ritter and I pulled bleeding noses off the windshield. Judson, leaning out like a locomotive engineer, was pointing.

"A side road! Hoofprints! They turned in here!"

A rutted wagon-track of grass and gravel, bending off through a gully to the right. You could see the prints of many horses. The trail bent off through underbrush, lost itself in moonlit forest on the mountainside. Horses could make time on such a road. No truck could get in there.

JUDSON wrenched the wheel and turned us onto the wagon path. The heavy wheels churned and dug. Gravel showered. He threw the clutch into second, looked back to signal the others to follow. We lumbered uphill.

The road steepened, twisted. Upgrade, five miles an hour. And ahead, hoofprints leading on and up and around. Forest jamming the path on either side. A mountain looming up ahead like a barrier of night. Silhouette of a ruined castle on the mountain-top, like a stencil of black paper pasted against the moon.

Judson snapped, "There's been a light in a window of that tower for the last half hour!"

We got there.

The road bulged up along the mountain-top at one point, and that medieval manse lay a little below. Crumbling battlements of stone, black parapets and bartizans frowning up out of the pines. One broken-down tower and one solid tower. There was a drift of cinnamon light in the courtyard at the front, and the courtyard was enclosed by a high crenellated wall that looked solid enough, and a massive wooden gate. The planks in the gate looked new.

From where our trucks had halted, the road ran downhill a hundred yards or so, and our headlights made a torch-spot on that massive gate. The gate was closed.

Judson cut off the engine; signaled the drivers behind to silence theirs. We sat in the cab, listening.

Wind in the pines. An owl. Perhaps an hour ago a lot of horses had galloped down that grade and gone through that gate. The wind veered, and I thought I could smell wood smoke and hear echoes of wild singing. I suppose El Lobo and his boys had gotten themselves gloriously drunk, and that was why they hadn't heard our engines. Or maybe the echoes in that moony altitude weren't right. When the wind shifted again you couldn't hear anything.

I was wondering what Judson was going to say to open that gate. "Open Sesame?"

He did not say that.

He stared down the hoof-tracked path to that castle gate, his face put

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on that swelling act again; and all he said was, *"Charge!"*

WE must have been going sixty miles an hour when we hit that gate. Can you think of an elephant going through the window of a saloon? A few thousand copies of a heavy photograph album run into tons of momentum. That truck didn't even stop! And the gate exploded like a dynamited cheese.

Ritter and I had only time to yell—and put our heads under our arms. But Judson had his hands steering that wheel, and his face was like rock behind the windshield. Crashed timbers splintered and flew like shell fragments. The windshield blew backwards in one burst. Judson's goggles probably saved his eyes, but you couldn't have bought his face for a dollar a dozen in Akron after that!

El Lobo's wolves surely had something of a shock when that truck arrived in their midst, but the scarlet death's-head framed in the cab's broken window must have actually frozen their tails between their legs. I got my turtled head out of my shoulders in time to see a courtyard going every which way, men bouncing around like acrobats, sombreros flying, figures like jumping-jacks. One hobo-jungle group was posed like dummies around a campfire—they'd been roasting Judson's white pigeons!

Judson couldn't stop—or wouldn't. The other trucks were roaring through the breach, and I don't think our brakes would hold. There was a great stone archway in the castle's face and a wide door open to a vast, gloomy hall.

Bam! I lost my bridgework going over that doorstep, and the truck slammed into that hall like a British tank. It didn't stop going until its bumper smacked the farthest wall. A lot of masonry and ceiling plaster tumbled down, and we were engulfed in a vast cobwebby cavern filled with shadows and slants of moonlight, and the bat smell and the shrieks of a witch tower.

I remember a flight of steps leading up to a stone balcony, and a lot of wild men coming down the steps, squalling bloody murder and waving bright knives. Judson grabbed the first thing to hand, and jumped out. And the first thing to hand was something that had been on the seat beside him—something he had kept there through all his long pilgrimage.

He threw like fury, and that heavy volume of World War photographs—the original, given him on shipboard by Drew—that first edition whined through the gloaming like something fired from a French seventy-five, and took the first bandit on the stairs a knockout crack in the face.

Red-haired Mr. Ritter was never slow at catching an idea. I saw him go up the side of the truck like a monkey on a stick. The bandits had already loosened the tarpaulin. Judson was screaming, "Throw at them! Throw at them!"

If I lived to a quintillion, I could never forget that battle. The first shower of books from our truck. The trucks outside getting the idea. Those White Shirted drivers leaping to the safety of their cab roofs, kicking and punching to stave off assault, grabbing and throwing, the whistle of those incredible missiles, the *smack* and *thock,* the tearing paper, the yowls of the wounded, oaths, bellows . . . There were all the tongues of the Foreign Legion among those volunteer pilgrims, and as many among El Lobo's mob . . . And above all, Judson run-

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ning up and down the line like a maniac directing a snowball fight, shouting, "Give them hell! Give them hell!"

I stood on top our truck with Ritter, pelting books at a merry-go-round of squalling brown faces. You cocked your arm just right and they made good scaling. A spinner on the temple hurt. The hymn books toward the bottom of the load were even heavier. The great ruined hall was strewn with literature. Volumes sailed and curved. I remember one cover broke off as I threw, and I cracked some ape in the eye with *I Want to Be An Angel.* For five minutes or so it was like a hurricane in a library.

But it was all Judson's fight. He organized the battle, rallied the men, directed the fire. He led the storming party up to that dark balcony. Bounding back into the castle hall from the courtyard, he tackled a gang of greasers, bare-fisted, at the foot of the stairs. Then a faint, stifled scream trickled down through the din, coming from some dark upper cranny of the tower.

"Eunice!" Judson shouted. "She's up there! Come on!"

HEAD lowered, fists slugging, he started up that wolf-jammed flight of steps. Somehow Ritter and I were after him, pegging books, mopping up the human debris. But he didn't leave much for us to do. His fists were pumping like pistons; hitting like steam-hammers. Step by step, he slugged, ripped and tore his way upward. Bandits churned and threshed around him, screeching like wildcats. Those spigs weren't throwing snowballs, or books either, but contesting the assault with knives. In the dust, gloom and plaster blizzard, you could see the flash of those blades. Stilettos, daggers, hunting-blades, jabbed at Judson on every side.

He plowed through that butchering riot like some indomitable mass of metal smashing its way through the piston-knives of a whirling meat-cutting machine. He ducked a stab and knocked a greaser senseless against the sidewall. He caught two dagger-waving bandits and smashed their heads together. He threw them over his shoulder for Ritter and me to catch, rolled them down the steps under his feet, kicked them flying, flung them like sacks of dog food over the stone balustrade.

"I'm coming, Eunice! I'm coming—!"

The stone bannister broke and crashed to the floor below. Bats flew squeaking. Granite blocks fell from the mouldy architecture overhead. When he finally reached that upper mezzanine, the whole old ruin seemed ready to collapse from the jarring. The dust was thick as the powder fog in a cement factory, and the *bandidos* caught on the landing were jumping down from the balcony and piling up in the hall below like rats jumping from a fire escape. Judson wiped blood from his glasses, put them back on, swerved and dashed for another flight of stairs.

Steps winding up into the tower, dark as the ascent to a belfry. We couldn't keep up with Judson. He took them four at a time.

The tower room was square, I remember, a lofty monk's cell with narrow slitted windows and a big jagged hole in the ceiling covered over with a piece of starry sky. El Lobo was there, humpbacked and mop-bearded with his evil eggshell eye and the musket that looked as if it fired mothballs.

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Shy Pedro, with his knife. Eunice, huddled on a mat of moonlight in a corner.

Naturally, thinking the uproar below meant victory for their side, Pedro and El Lobo were surprised to see Judson. He didn't look like Judson any more; but they knew at least that he carried no weapon in his hands.

Pedro tiptoed forward with the knife, smiling coyly.

El Lobo merely raised the gun.

Eunice screamed: "Look out for the gun!" and Judson was on top of them like a tempest unchained. He picked up Pedro as if he were made of bamboo, and splintered him down on El Lobo's head. El Lobo was squeezing the musket, but the ancient trigger was sticky. El Lobo went down like a squashed toadstool under Pedro, and Judson went down with both in a clawing tangle of rags, teeth and beards that spun across the floor like some outlandish whirling bundle of soiled laundry. The bundle separated —Pedro pulling his fractured bones together in a corner; Judson somersaulting to a stand; El Lobo spinning like a top in mid floor. It separated for an instant, then came together again so fast that Ritter and I didn't have a chance to get into it.

Fists flying. Boots flailing. The whipping light of Pedro's blade. El Lobo's milky eye. Judson's glasses blazing, his shirt coming off in fragments, his breath blowing in long whistling gasps, his knuckles pounding like sledge hammers, *crack, crack, crack!* They went down together, and they got up together. They went down individually, and got up individually. Under the rain of knife-cuts from Pedro, Judson was turning red from head to foot. Under the storm of blows from Judson's red fists, Pedro was breaking up into kindling, and the howling Wolf was becoming jelly.

Ritter could only stand there yelling, "Wow! Wow!"

I tried to join in, and I got in the way of one of those red fists of Judson's, and that is how I got my black eye.

I COULDN'T quite see how it ended. Judson was beating that pair of kidnapers into a Spanish omelette, and Eunice was moaning, and the tower room, like the music, went round and round. As the radio gabs would say, it was a great fight, folks!

But Judson couldn't last forever. Pedro still clutched his knife, and El Lobo still clung to his gun. So Judson, pulling a last desperate haymaker up from his shoe tops, caught Pedro a final blast on the chin. Pedro spun and recovered and smiled shyly and sprang; and El Lobo got in the way by mistake, and Pedro blindly drove his knife to the hilt in El Lobo's back.

The Wolf died then and there with an appalling howl, and his death grip pulled the sticky trigger of the ancient rifle twice. *Wha-wham!*

Bullet Number One caught the stumbling Pedro squarely in the back of the head.

Bullet Number Two went through Judson Stairway's left arm, clean as a piccolo hole, perfectly and exactly through the passage charted twelve months ago by a bullet from General Pierre Césaire Fulgence Montfaucon, missing bones and arteries.

JUDSON turned then, and picked up Eunice with his right arm; and we trooped down the tower steps. In the wreckage of the hall at the bottom Judson had to stop a minute for breath. The ruin of the castle was

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hushed. Quiet had pooled in the courtyard outside, but far down the mountain fleeing men were wailing. Some wraiths in white shirts sat about, holding their heads.

Judson stared about him dumbly, a ragged red wreck of a man, hair disheveled, beard half gone, something more than tobacco juice splotting his bosom now. His elbows and knees were dripping, his shirt in slashed ribbons, his glasses cracked. I saw his eyes go across a pile of torn books to the truck that stood ghostly at the end of the hall. The headlamps were still burning, and there was a sickly backwash of light. Enough light to see, if you stared, the signs painted on the sides:

Books Instead of Bullets!
Don't Fight!

I stared at the Ambassador of Peace. Judson was staring at the signs.

He stared so long there was a noise in the doorway. The truck driver we had sent for help, and a batch of Andorran soldiers in uniform, and Captain Alejandro Escobedo of the Andorran Guardia rushed in.

"Congratulations, *señor!*" the captain yelped. "You have done it, *señor!* Scattered the bandits, and captured The Wolf, their leader! *Señor* is a great fighter, a great hero, a general! Andorra shall award you a medal reserved only for soldiers, a medal only given to great warriors, the biggest and greatest medal you have ever seen!"

Judson pulled himself to attention, hand at salute.

Eunice flung her arms around that battered neck. "Oh, thank God!" she was moaning. "Thank God! Judson is himself again. . . ."

Judson, with Eunice at his side, marched out of the door.

For a wedding present, Cranshaw Drew sent Judson a copy of his latest book: *The Coming Armageddon: Why the Countries of the World Must Rearm.*

* * *

What really did happen there in Andorra? Well, I've told you.

Who was Judson Stairway? He was you, my friend, and me—and all of us who bump our rosy high ideals against the cold hard rafters of reality; who learn the stars are made of tinsel-covered cardboard on the Christmas Tree; who try in our groping way to climb, and bark our shins at the top against an actuality of night, proving ourselves only human after all.

And why? Boys, you've got me there. But the thing is, that men do keep trying. And someday, perhaps—! But until then—

Onward Christian Soldiers.

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In the Bag

By HUGH B. CAVE

HE watched the girl for at least thirty seconds before deciding to put his foot down on the brake-pedal. Hitch-hikers on Florida's Dixie Highway were as plentiful as coconuts on the palm trees and as much of a nuisance, sometimes, as trucks and trailers. But she was young to be thumbing rides at four-thirty in the morning. So he stopped.

"Been on the road all night, sweetheart?"

She shook her head. She was all of five feet three, weighed easily a hundred pounds, and was scared. Cute, he decided, despite the lines of fatigue that marred her pale face.

"I left Miami at three o'clock," she said, and timidly added, "My room rent wasn't paid, so I had to get up before the landlady did."

He leaned over and took the suitcase from her hand. Its weight surprised him. Gently, so that its battered cardboard cover would not burst open, he swung it onto the rear seat. The girl got in beside him and pulled the door shut.

"Half frozen, aren't you?" he observed.

"Uh-huh." Florida mornings could be cold, and the ragged red sweater she wore could not be very warming.

She was going home, she said. She had gone to Miami to meet someone, but had failed to make connections. She had tried to find work—but Miami was full of girls looking for work. Her name, she said, was Matalee.

"Mine," he said, grinning, "is Jim Smith. I'm a salesman."

None of this was strictly true.

He was a United States Customs Special Agent. He was in Florida investigating an influx of heroin, marijuana and poppy poison from Cuba. His name was not Jim Smith, but Art Mace. And the suitcase, the hour and the girl —especially the suitcase—had aroused his suspicions.

Dope could be carried that way. Dope, in suitcases toted by pseudo down-and-out hitch-hikers, had already, according to authentic reports, found its way safely out of Miami and into circulation elsewhere.

Thinking about it, he drove along at a steady forty mile an hour clip, casually studying his passenger. Presently he said, "That's a heavy bag you've got, isn't it?"

She had picked up a magazine and was scowling.

"Do you read this?" she asked.

He chuckled. The magazine had been sent to him, for no known reason, months ago. Its title was *Lonely? Why?* Many a dreary evening had been

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made less dreary by his correspondence with the lonely hearts listed in it.

"My one dissipation," he admitted. "You meet the queerest people."

"Do you?"

"My first letter was a blind stab in the dark, to a girl who called herself Constant Heart and quoted Confucius to me. 'And I know why our breathing is nothing more than a perpetual sigh,' said she. I guess it's the hellion in me. Some lads collect postage stamps. I prefer love letters from lonely ladies."

He grinned at her.

The girl was silent, staring at him. Perhaps she, too, was thinking about the suitcase.

"You're too young to appreciate such stuff," he said. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"Sweet seventeen. One of my lonely hearts said she was seventeen. Many an ardent letter I banged out to her on the old portable. Georgia gal. So help me, I even sent her a photo."

"What was *her* name?"

"Darned if I remember. She most always signed herself *Lover.*"

There was a small, inconsequential silence.

"Are you going far?" she said, after a little.

"West Palm Beach," he said. "I do a lot of business in West Palm. Sold five thousand yellow shirts there last trip."

"I guess you're a good salesman." She smiled. "I mean, with your line you could sell anything."

He laughed. She was a nice kid. But you never could tell . . . and he'd have a look at that suitcase, just the same, when she got out of the car. She was just the type the runners would use.

She was so young and innocent looking—

IN West Palm Beach, at the intersection of 33rd Street and North Dixie, he stopped the car. "I guess this is where you get out. Been nice to have met you. Sure has. A girl as cute as you ought to be way up around Jacksonville by dark. Here, take this, so you'll have a place to sleep tonight."

She took the bill and thanked him. He leaned over the seat and grabbed the suitcase.

"No," she said quickly. "Let me."

"Huh?"

"It—it's all ready to fall apart."

His jaw tightened. "Lady," said Art Mace, "you've been riding with the wrong man. You played your cards wrong. I was wise to you from the start."

She didn't reach again for the suitcase, but stood very still on the sidewalk, watching while he dragged the bag out of the car and plunked it down on the curb.

"I happen to know all about—" Art Mace began.

He yanked the battered bag open, while the girl stared. Clothes tumbled out on the sidewalk. He pulled out shoes, underclothes, a pair of slacks, more shoes, more clothes—and then, with a grunt of satisfaction, a worn leather box once used for stationery.

"—all about this racket," he muttered. "All about it, lady."

The girl had not spoken. She watched him, watched his hands as he lifted out a pack of letters and a photograph. Her eyes were wet when, after a long while, he slowly raised his head and looked up at her.

"You—you might at least have remembered my name," she said.

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Hocus Pocus

By LESTER DENT
Author of "Hades," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MARVELOUS MERTON

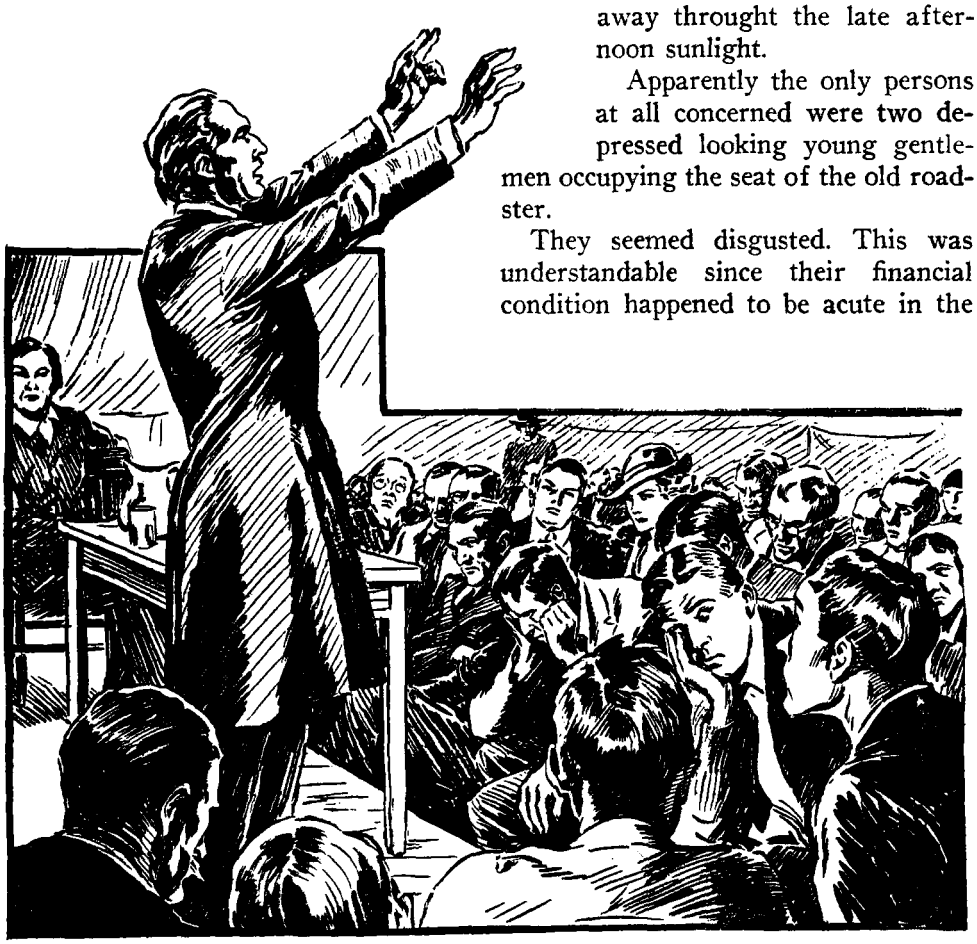
THE elderly roadster was running out of gas. The needle was staggering back against the little brass pin on the side of the gauge marked with an *E*. This had been going on for a mile, which was about the limit. Sure enough, the engine stopped knocking over, the fenders ceased shaking, a cloud of dust subsided, and there sat the old roadster and the battered red trailer which was attached to it. After which anyone who cared to do so could have read the legend painted on the faded vermilion sides of the trailer.

THE MARVELOUS MERTON
The World's Most Amazing Magician!!

There was, unfortunately, no interested observer. There was nothing at all but a dusty gravel road, barbed wire fences, Missouri corn fields, and several indifferent crows which winged away throught the late afternoon sunlight.

Apparently the only persons at all concerned were two depressed looking young gentlemen occupying the seat of the old roadster.

They seemed disgusted. This was understandable since their financial condition happened to be acute in the



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extreme. Also, there was nothing whatever to eat in the old salmon-colored trailer. And now, they'd run out of gas.

One of the two—The Marvelous Merton, in person, stared thoughtfully after the departing crows.

"I wonder," he ruminated, "if they pay a bounty on crow scalps."

The Marvelous Merton had a snub nose equipped with freckles, pleasant crinkly blue eyes, and a mouth that was more engagingly ample. He was tall enough to seem a little gangling. His dusty brown suit badly needed pressing. There was a tear in the left knee of his trousers; it was his best suit, his only suit, and he felt badly about that torn place, resulting from a misguided attempt to catch a squirrel for last night's supper.

The Marvelous Merton ran long tanned fingers thoughtfully through his hair. This hair was by far the most striking thing about his appearance. It was as white as snow, and contrasted oddly with his fresh young face. The white hair stood up in a spectacular mop; and it was the one thing about him which made him look at all like a magician.

The other occupant of the roadster frowned glumly. He was Imagination Daly, the Marvelous Merton's stooge, or stage assistant.

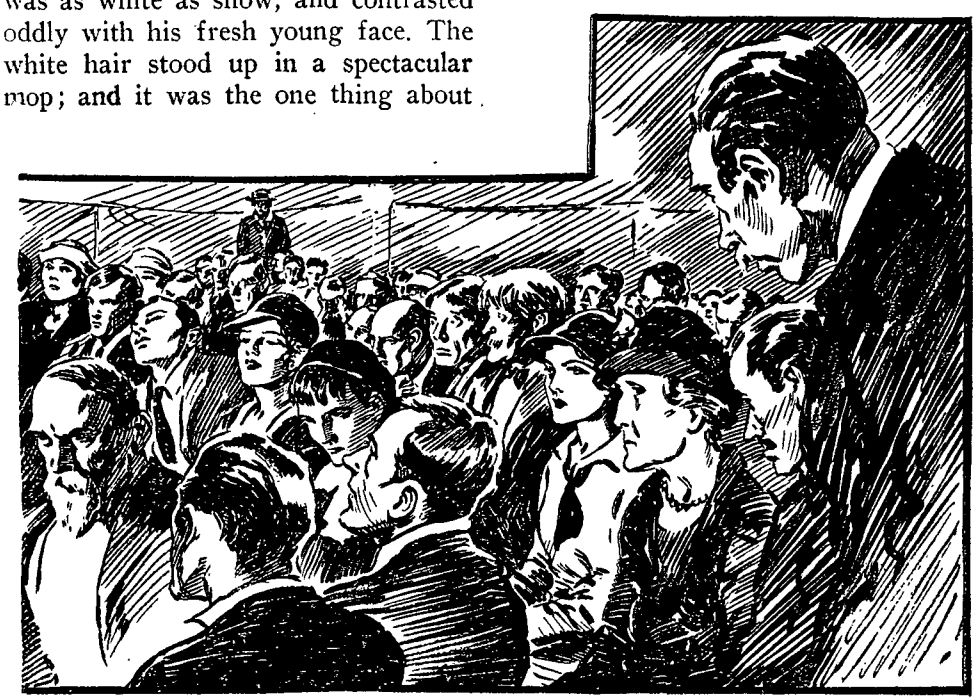
"Where's that newspaper, Cal?" he asked forlornly. "My courage feels the need of another shot in the arm."

Cal Merton—the Marvelous Merton—inserted a lean, muscular hand into the inner pocket of his dusty brown coat and brought out the help wanted page of a St. Louis newspaper.

Imagination Daly grasped the sheet, spread it on his knee, then drew a rabbit's foot from a trouser pocket and with it feelingly stroked an item in which he was vitally interested.

"Hope springs eternal," he muttered. "But a little luck won't hurt, either."

IMAGINATION DALY managed to get much plaintive earnestness into his words. Imagination had close-



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cropped hair which stood on end and was redder than the old trailer attached to the roadster. He wore spectacles with large horn rims.

Closer inspection showed an unusual fact. Imagination Daly, except for his red hair and spectacles, looked almost exactly like the Marvelous Merton. They had the same freckled snub noses, crinkly blue eyes, large mouths, and about the same height.

WANTED—Expert mind-reader. Male. Good salary. Smith, Phone Eversham 7-3000.

This was the advertisement that Imagination Daly was encouraging with the rabbit foot. The date in the upper left hand corner of the page was Monday—and this was Friday. It was also the thirteenth, Cal recalled as he watched Imagination's concentration. He wasn't superstitious himself. But he urgently hoped that something would come out of the fact that on last Monday, he had talked over the long distance telephone to Smith, the man who had inserted the want ad. Smith had had a sleepy voice, and used the most ungodly long sentences. There was nothing vague about the questions he asked. He had apparently wanted to know every incident in the Marvelous Merton's life, starting off with birthplace and parentage. Fortunately Cal's record was clean, if undistinguished—born on a Missouri farm, schooling on up through State Teachers' College in Kirksville, then a career in show business that commenced with driving tent stakes for a chautauqua, and advanced to magician's assistant; next he'd been a magician and mind-reader with tent shows and in vaudeville, and lately he'd made an effort to branch out with his own traveling magical show, which hadn't been so successful. Smith must have taken this down in shorthand, because he'd repeated it back.

Cal wondered about Smith. The man hadn't explained a thing about himself, or about the job. But Cal had got the impression that Smith, in spite of his garrulousness, was very grim and businesslike. Indeed, Cal had once or twice felt that there might be something unique about the mind-reading job. It was hard to define—just a vague impression.

Smith had made an appointment for a personal interview in a hotel in Fort Madison, Iowa, Friday night. Today was Friday, Fort Madison was forty miles away; they were broke, and they were out of gas.

"Cal," said Imagination Daly thoughtfully.

"Eh?"

"I'm hungry."

Cal nodded his head, for he was conscious of his own undernourished and complaining stomach.

"Cal . . ."

"Well?" Cal narrowed one blue eye expectantly.

"We've got to eat the rabbit," said Imagination.

"No."

"But—"

"No!"

"Now, listen, Cal, why not eat the rabbit?"

"It's the principle of the thing," explained the Marvelous Merton firmly. "No magician is an absolute failure until he eats his rabbit. It's a dividing line. A last straw. When he eats his rabbit, a magician is, well—he's *pffft!*"

"You're kidding me," Imagination muttered. "And I'm starving to death, and it's not funny." He pulled in a

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tremulous sigh. "When I think of how fat that rabbit is . . ."

"That's out," Cal said, but added, "for the time being, anyway."

CAL MERTON unfolded his dusty length from behind the wheel and unscrewed the gas tank cap in front of the windshield—this roadster was of a vintage that carried the gasoline container there—and inserted the stem of a dry weed. This came out as dry as it went in. Cal threw the weed away, then gazed hopefully up and down the gravel road, but there was no sign of any traffic. It would soon be dark.

The Marvelous Merton puckered his broad mouth and whistled a tune somewhat lighter than his spirits. Present circumstances weren't, he mused, so funny. Such things never are when they're happening. They were flat, and nobody in Kansas, Iowa or Missouri seemed to give a whoop about seeing a good magic act. Theaters out here didn't have vaudeville; it was summer so giving entertainment at the school auditoriums was out of the question, and it was too early in the summer for the county fairs. If the Smith mind-reading job didn't pan . . . The prospect made Cal's throat dry.

He ambled back to the trailer to get a drink of water. The trailer was equipped with two bunks, a table, a kerosene stove, a gasoline lantern, and a cupboard as bare as Mother Hubbard's. The forward part of the trailer held the rabbit in its cage as well as the other gimmicks and stage apparatus necessary to a magician's act.*

Cal got a drink of water and an idea simultaneously. As a result of the idea, he grasped the gasoline lantern with one hand, the kerosene stove with the other, and walked back to the roadster.

"We'll start the motor on gas," he explained. "Then we'll see if she'll run on kerosene from the stove."

It worked, and the old roadster and ancient trailer rolled through the late afternoon sunlight, reached Fort Madison soon after dark, stopped before a hotel, and the Marvelous Merton entered the hotel, learned Smith had a room, went up to the room, knocked on the door and the door opened.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERIOUS SMITH

NOTHING about the automatic pistol looked large except the hole where the bullets might come out. It was a deep blue color. Its one hollow eye seemed to examine with anticipation the middle button of the startled Marvelous Merton's brown vest.

The person who held the gun was long, with curves which left little to be desired, and a complexion so superb that cosmetics could hardly make any improvement. As added equipment, she had exquisite lips, an enchanting nose and some disturbingly long cinnamon lashes. There was no make-up on her face, nor did she need it.

"Step right in," invited the girl in a voice that was nice, but determined.

Cal started to run lean fingers through his mop of white hair, but took another look at the gun and changed his mind. "The gentleman must be in the wrong pew," he said.

"It's the right pew," said the young woman shortly. "Come on in."

"But—"

"You were looking for Mr. Smith, weren't you?"

* Gimmick is a term applied by magicians to the mechanical devices, usually the smaller ones, which they employ to secure many of their effects.

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"That," said Cal, "is just the point." He squinted distastefully at the gun. "You aren't Smith. I never saw you before and I can't work up much enthusiasm over that implement you're holding."

"Come on in. Close the door."

Cal did both, wondering if he looked as dubious as he felt. He had left Imagination Daly down in the street to watch the trailer.

The young woman studied Cal with considerable interest. She seemed to be absorbed in learning how he was standing up under his present situation. Cal's pulse seemed to be having trouble getting back to its accustomed pace. The meanest looking thing in the world, he suddenly felt convinced, was the noisy end of a gun.

"Won't you sit down?" the girl asked, politely enough.

"I doubt," Cal said, "if I'm going to be in here long enough to make it worth while." He looked at her earnestly and added, "I'm the Marvelous Merton. I came here to see a man named Smith about a job. I never saw Smith. I know nothing about him or the job. So you see," he finished, "there's been a mistake."

"I think," said the girl, "that you may be here longer than you expect." She returned his earnest look and continued, "I know who you are. I know why you came. I know how much you know. So if I were you," she ended, "I'd sit down."

Cal's jaw squared out in stubborn lines. His mind entertained three thoughts. One: The girl was sane, and no one in his—or her—right mind would shoot him for not sitting down. Two: She was wacky, and might pop a bullet into him if he batted an eye. Three: What in the devil was this all about?

He sat down. "Now we'll stop pretending," advised the young woman.

"Swell," said Cal. He noted that the hotel room was shabby. The design in the old carpet was as gaudy as a florist's window, but the nap was worn down to the burlap-like base cloth in spots. There was one bed with a frog green spread, a bow-legged dresser, and two doors. One door might be a closet door, the other perhaps a bathroom door. A green window shade was drawn down to the bottom. Light came from a gray glass ceiling bowl, shaped like a pumpkin, which, if cleaned, might yield a heaping palmful of moths and bugs.

"I am Neeta," said the girl.

The name seemed to fit her, Cal reflected. Neeta. Neat. Very neat. Not at all hard to look at either. He felt a perceptible stir of interest entirely aside from the mystery of why anyone should point a gun at him when he came to interview Smith.

"Smith," continued the young woman, "has been taken care of."

THAT slapped the Marvelous Merton. He happened to be one of numerous millions of Americans who had never knowingly encountered a gangster or a gangster's moll. But he'd seen enough movies to jump at conclusions about what the remark—taken care of—meant. With the next surge, his mind decided he must have seen too many movies. He must be mistaken.

"I see," he remarked. "So the job has been filled already."

The girl smiled in a queer way. "That's *not* what I mean," she said.

Cal gazed at her with both eyes wide, and wondered if appearances could be that deceptive. Here was a strikingly pretty girl, but unless he was mistaken,

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she was explaining that something grisly had happened to Smith.

"You don't mean—bumped off?" Cal demanded.

"What else?" The girl shrugged a pair of exquisitely shaped shoulders. "Did you think," she added, "that we could take any chances?"

Cal suppressed an impulse to draw out a handkerchief and wipe his brow. Or better still, to get up on his long legs and walk out of here. This thing was crazy.

"Hmmm." That noise was the only appropriate thing the Marvelous Merton could think of.

"You," suggested the girl, "don't seem as relieved as you might."

"Who, me? Oh—er, should I be relieved?"

"The chief explained that you were with us. So you can feel free to talk."

Cal began to take a tremendous dislike to the chief, whoever he was. It seemed unpleasantly careless of him to spread such misinformation. Furthermore, it was a downright dirty trick, because it might get the Marvelous Merton into serious trouble. Blazes! Cal yanked up rigid in the chair. Trouble! Say, he'd already put his foot in it. He'd sat here and let the girl explain that Smith had been disposed of violently. Dangerous information!

Cal sank back in the chair, relaxed and crossed his lengthy legs. His large mouth lifted at the ends, in a smile that seemed genuine enough. He'd learned to wear this particular smile during the most trying circumstances —for instance when some wise guy in the audience began spoiling his magic by calling out how the trick was done.

"Well, well," he said. "I didn't know anybody had explained."

The girl's nut-brown eyes narrowed. Then she drew a straight-backed chair in front of him, and planted herself on it. "I'm supposed to get some information from you," she explained. "Those are my orders."

You will have to go some to do that, Cal thought, because I don't know anything about it. Aloud, he said, "Any objections to my having a smoke?"

"Naturally not."

Cal noticed that she watched his hand and kept her gun ready as he reached into a pocket and brought out a cigarette package. He also brought out a golf ball, but that was palmed and she didn't see it. "Have one?" He offered the cigarettes.

"No, thanks." Her eyes regarded him intently. "The orders are for you to explain in detail your recent activities. This is for the purpose of making me acquainted with your abilities. You see," she finished, "you are to work under my direction henceforth."

Cal leaned back and moved the cigarette package slightly so as to draw it to her attention. Then he held the package out at arm's length and slowly enclosed it in his fist; then he opened his fist, and the package had vanished.*

The girl frowned at the empty hand, startled.

Cal threw the palmed golf ball with the other hand. He'd done juggling in his time, so this was easy. The girl's attention was on the empty hand. The golf ball hit her gun, knocking it out of her clutch. Then Cal leaped and whipped both arms around her. He strained with all the strength of his long muscles, clamped her tightly to the chair, for he had no way of knowing that she might not have another weapon somewhere. They remained

* A simple trick, like most magician "vanishes." It is done with an elastic up the sleeve, a clamp on the end. The articles are whipped up the sleeve too fast for the eye to follow.

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motionless and tense for some moments, and he grew conscious of the exciting pound of her heart, aware that her hair had a pleasant fragrance.

The Marvelous Merton was aware of a strong personal prejudice against the situation. He found himself wishing fervently that this particular young woman wasn't a crook. It wasn't at all right. It went beyond the simple social premise that there should be no crooks. It was a personal concern of Cal Merton's. In other words, the thing he should do now was call a policeman. But somehow the idea didn't appeal to him much.

"Damn!" he said. "I guess I'll have to call a cop, though."

"I'm so glad," said the girl fervently as a relieved sigh escaped her. She relaxed.

"Glad?"

"Don't you see?" she exclaimed. "I was only trying to learn if you were one of our enemies."

THE Marvelous Merton experienced a rush of relief, but he felt in no hurry to release the attractive prisoner. Her explanation had a reasonable ring. Or did it? She might just be exercising quick wits. The whole thing was unexpected and melodramatic enough to upset all the usual logical processes of reasoning. And he knew that she had just said exactly what he rather wanted her to say. That would naturally influence him toward believing her. He decided to be wary.

"I don't get this," he said.

"Naturally not," she replied.

"Hmmm."

"Since you only came here to apply for a job," explained the young woman, "you would not understand. Nothing I said would make sense."

"It would sound kind of bad too, don't you think?"

She studied his pleasantly rugged face at close range—he was still holding her. She nodded. "It would," she agreed.

"Do you," Cal asked, "think I've got average sense?"

That surprised her. "So far, you seem to be above average. Judging," she added, "from the trick by which you disarmed me."

"Anybody with average gumption would now call a cop," Cal explained. "Which is exactly what I'm going to do." He picked her up bodily and carried her toward the telephone which was fastened to the wall.

"Wait!" she gasped. "Don't you believe me?"

"I'm on the fence."

She struggled. It did her no good. "Haven't you got any adventure in your make-up?" she exclaimed.

"No."

"But—"

"Nobody has an adventure unless they use bad judgment," said the Marvelous Merton philosophically. He reached for the telephone.

The bathroom door opened and out came an old man—a huge old man who must be nearly seven feet tall and who was as bald as a turkey buzzard except for the tufts of black hair that grew out of his ears.

"We can't have this, sonny," he said.

CHAPTER III

TURKEY BUZZARD

CAL MERTON flung a wary glance at the bald old giant, half expecting to discover that he had a gun. No. No gun. Next, Cal saw several mistakes. Darn it, he hadn't taken

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enough precautions. Should have had the young woman's automatic in his hand. Unfortunately, it lay under the bed where it had fallen. He should have searched the place, too, not taken for granted the girl was alone.

Only thing now was race the bald ancient for the door. Cal flung the girl away, pitched for the door. The bald old fellow began laughing. Cal got the door open, halted half outside and frowned at the giant. Cal was puzzled.

The old fellow continued to chuckle. His mirth shook his wide, gaunt shoulders and set to jerking a pair of arms that reminded Cal of railroad ties. The old man had a prominent nose, piercing whisky-colored eyes, a wide thin mouth. He wore a blue suit which appeared loose enough to fold around him twice, a white shirt, and an atrocious orange necktie with the knot askew. The general impression was that of a confident old giant who had done a lot with his strength in his day, but who had learned that it was better to rely on brains. Furthermore, he probably wasn't nearly as hoary as he'd at first looked, Cal decided—the bald giant probably wasn't much past fifty.

"I'm Smith," he announced.

"Smith?"

"Sure." He sat down in a chair and the chair gave a loud groan. He leaned back and clamped his hands on the sides of the chair. The hands were as knobby as stovewood, reddish gray in color, and as furry as his head was bald.

Smith grinned, showing enormous white teeth. "This is kind of a wild and woolly introduction."

"Yes," said Cal. "It is."

"Would it help any if we apologized?"

"It might help more if you explained."

Smith nodded his great bald head. "Easy. We wanted to learn how much horse sense you had."

"That," Cal said suspiciously, "don't sound right."

"What's wrong with it?" Smith asked, and grinned. "We wanted to hire a man with common ordinary gumption. Neeta"—he nodded at the young woman—"and I talked it over, and we figured we'd try some blood and thunder out on you. The way it affected you would show us how your head is fastened on your shoulders." He slapped the chair arms and thumped a laugh. "I must say you did very well."

Cal glanced at the girl, and his gaze remained fixed on her. She sat tense on the edge of the frog-green bed, arms slanted rigidly at her sides. The expression on her exquisite face made Cal remember when he had seen an actress receive the news, just before curtain time, that her small son had been killed by an automobile. The actress had played through the performance. But afterward, she had looked much as this girl looked now . . .

Smith said quickly, "Neeta is a little upset by the excitement."

Cal decided she looked upset about something. He came back into the room, closed the door, and planted himself, a long, spectacular young man with white hair, against the wall.

"I don't like this," he said. "But I'll listen."

SMITH passed enormous hairy hands over his hairless skull, and made pleased, smacking sounds with his leathery lips.

"That's more like it," he chuckled. "Boy, we've got a job for you." He leaned forward. "How much mind-reading experience have you had?"

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"A professional for a year," Cal answered. "And I've been interested in the subject a long time."

"You're up on it, then?"

"I think so."

"What is your attitude?"

"Attitude?"

"I mean—is there any such thing as a genuine mind-reader?"

Cal snorted. "Want my candid opinion?"

"Of course."

"Hokum."

Smith seemed pleased. "Mind-reading is the bunk, eh?"

"Spiritualism, mind-reading, crystal gazing—hocus pocus, all of it. Its only purpose should be to entertain people. It is done with trickery, just as magic is done. I've seen plenty of it, done plenty of it, and that's all there is to it."

"Ever hear of extrasensory perception?" Smith asked earnestly.*

"Of course."

"Anything to that?"

"Nothing that anybody has been able to prove."

"I see."

"You understand," Cal added, "that this is my personal opinion. That's what you asked for."

"Absolutely." Smith bobbed his bald dome and clucked. "Very good. You have just the mental attitude we want, boy. Perfect."

"I see," Cal said.

But he did not see. There was something queer about that test. Learning how much horse sense he had, were they? Maybe. Maybe. While it was happening it hadn't seemed that way. Granting that the girl was a superb actress, besides being as attractive a feminine creature as Cal could recall having seen, it was still queer.

As anyone could see, the girl seemed under a strain. Frightened? He couldn't tell. She might be only nervous after the rough handling she had received. He had been abrupt with her, so maybe it was only that. It was hard to tell by looking at her what her emotions were. On the stage and screen, actresses show fright or horror plainly by using standard bits of business—the start, the wide open mouth, the staring eyes. But in real life, it wasn't so easy to tell.

"Ever hear of the New Apostles?" Smith asked.

"New Apostles?"

Smith nodded. "They also call themselves Missionaries of the True Faith of Peace."

Cal shook his head. "New one on me."

"Their headquarters is called the Righteous Land. Ever hear of that?"

"No."

"Your education has been neglected, boy. A mind-reader who never heard of the New Apostles is like a politician who never heard of Jim Farley." Smith spread his red hands on his lap and eyed them. They were big, crushing hands, and they had scars on them.

"HERE'S the dope on the New Apostles from the beginning," he continued. "Once upon a time, a few years ago, when the depression was really something, there was an evangelist who had been a mind-reader. This evangelist inherited a farm, located in South Missouri near the Lake of the Ozarks, from a relative who died. The evangelist brought several followers to the farm. None of them

* Extrasensory perception may exist. It may not. There is scientific argument on that point. It is a term applied generally to the mysterious ability, if any, of some people to know things they apparently couldn't know. Ever write a friend to whom you hadn't written in months, only to receive a letter written by the friend at the same time you were writing yours? That's extrasensory perception.

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had any money. They struck pretty tough sledding, I understand."

Smith paused, and his penetrating old eyes drifted toward the girl. She nodded, as if corroborating what he was saying.

"The evangelists got the idea of incorporating a little mind-reading into their preaching," Smith added. "The mind-reading caught on with the public. Instead of mere evangelistic preaching, they now put on a show. They prospered. The evangelists called themselves the New Apostles, and named their farm the Righteous Land. They were very successful."

Smith grinned. "Later, the New Apostles began sending out traveling units. They made a hit. Today, each New Apostle lives close to the soil in the Righteous Land for nine months of the year, and spends the other three months with units, preaching the True Faith of Peace, which is what they call their doctrine. One of the New Apostle traveling units," he finished, "is here in "is here in Fort Madison this week. I want you to join it."

"The job is with the New Apostles?" Cal said.

"Not exactly, boy. You work for me. I pay you. And you join the New Apostles and make certain reports to me."

"Just what is this anyway?"

Smith said, "Scientific research."

"Eh?"

"I am Professor Erasmus Smith," said Smith. "I am a psychologist. Extrasensory perception is my hobby. For years, I have been trying to prove that it exists. I want to study these New Apostles. They accomplish some remarkable things. But it so happens that they know me by sight, and won't let me come around. So I thought I would hire a professional mind reader, get him in the organization, and see what he could dig up. I want to know every move of these Apostles."

Cal Merton regarded the girl with azure interest. She seemed to be perched a little straighter, a little more tensely, on the edge of the bed. And there was something like compression around her shapely lips, and small gray bars of strain ridging the backs of her well-formed hands, while her eyes were down, so that whatever was in them could not be seen, and her breathing was very deep and regular, as breathing becomes when there is strong emotion.

Cal said, "Let's get it straight. You are Professor Erasmus Smith. Your hobby is mind-reading, or extrasensory perception. The New Apostles won't let you study their methods; you want to hire me to do it for you?"

"Exactly," said Smith.

Cal said bluntly, "I don't like it."

"Great grief! Why not?"

"Professional ethics, Smith. An entertainment act is a personal property, as much as an automobile or the money in your pocket. Suppose somebody tried to pick your pockets? That's the same thing."

"No," Smith said, "it isn't."

"I fail to see any difference."

"Suppose," Smith suggested, "that the founder of the New Apostles told you it was perfectly all right to study their methods and report to me?"

"That might be different," admitted Cal.

Smith got up. He seemed startlingly tall, even though he carried his bony shoulders with a stoop.

Bowing toward the young woman, "May I introduce the Saint Neeta," he said. "Saint Neeta is the evangelist, the ex-mind-reader, who founded the New Apostles."

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Cal thought he probably looked as startled as he felt. Evangelist! This pretty girl! His conception of a female evangelist had been a bovine character with a long, severe face, poke bonnet, and several petticoats. It was a shock to have that illusion shattered.

The Saint Neeta arose gracefully and took Cal's right hand in both of hers. The result was a pleasant disturbance inside the Marvelous Merton.

"It is perfectly all right for you to join us and make observations for Professor Smith," she said. "And I do hope you will decide to accept."

With a voice like that guiding its destinies, Cal thought, no wonder the New Apostles had prospered. He'd bet she had no trouble making converts.

"Saint Neeta will furnish you with as much assistance as she can," said Smith.

The Marvelous Merton looked into the disturbing brown eyes of the Saint Neeta, and made a mental notation to need a lot of assistance.

"It's a sale," he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW APOSTLES

IMAGINATION DALY was a pleasant screwball. His startling physical resemblance to the Marvelous Merton accounted for his present job. Remove Imagination Daly's horn-rimmed spectacles and put a white wig on him, and he became the image of the Marvelous Merton. They utilized this similarity in their magic, particularly in one trick. In this piece of legerdemain, Cal was placed inside a steel cylinder, which was welded air-tight by bystanders, then submerged in a lake. Shortly, Cal would appear in the crowd, dry and unruffled, and talk with everyone, then go off and disappear. When the cylinder was hauled out and cut open with acetylene torches, Cal was found inside, dry, unperturbed. In this trick, of course, it was really Imagination Daly, Cal's double, who appeared and talked to the crowd.*

But Imagination Daly's resemblance to Cal Merton was no deeper than the physical. In character, they were poles apart. Cal was hard-headed, sensible, and not easily upset. Imagination Daly was erratic, easily discouraged, and as readily made happy. He had one strong point. Loyalty. He would, in the end, do almost anything for Cal, who was probably the one individual who had ever inspired anything like that in Imagination Daly. On the drawback side of the ledger, Imagination balked. He disliked work. That is, any kind of work except magic, although he was a poor magician himself.

His principal liability was an unusual one. He was a liar, a chronic teller of falsehoods. Strangely enough, he couldn't help it, due to some phychological quirk in his make-up. Imagination Daly was a liar, and he couldn't help it. He would lie to anyone, Cal included, on the slightest provocation.

Imagination Daly sat in the roadster, parked across the street from the hotel. When Cal came out of the hotel, Imagination was eyeing a restaurant nearby. The night breeze was wafting disturbing odors from this eating establishment.

"Food!" groaned Imagination Daly. "Food."

Cal's pleasant blue eyes gazed amiably at his stooge. "Probably a steak

* This trick, amazing in its effect, is the specialty of a famous magician. The author, an amateur magician himself, does not know of a certainty how it is done. The explanation presented here probably is not the one used by this magician.

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smothered in onions, with a big side of shoestring potatoes, hot biscuits—"

"Don't do that!" Imagination moaned hoarsely. "That's mental cruelty. I've got a contract with you which says the party of the second part—that's me—shall receive consideration in keeping with the position of magician's assistant." He squinted at Cal. "Did you get the job?"

Cal pulled at his long jaw. His height, freckles and snub nose gave him a boyish aspect which, however, was most noticeable at a distance. At closer range, his air of competence, muscular and physical, added maturity to his boyish assortment of features.

"I got the job," he said, "or the job got me. I'm not sure which."

"Is it with a show?"

"Evangelists."

"What?"

"A professor of psychology wants me to learn if there's anything genuine about a mind-reading act featured by some evangelists called the New Apostles. It pays a hundred a week, and I got twenty in advance."

"Fork over," suggested Imagination Daly.

"Eh?"

"My contract. Don't forget I've got a contract. It says you furnish me with food, lodging, transportation and twenty per cent of our net earnings. There have finally been some net earnings. Fork over." Imagination pulled in a determined sigh. "I'm holding you to that contract." He held out a hand. "Four bucks out of that twenty, please."

"You may not like our new job."

"Whatcha mean?"

"It smells."

"Huh?"

"You see," Cal said, "I never talked to Smith at all."

"But you got the job—"

"The bald buzzard I talked to said he was Smith, but he wasn't," Cal said grimly. "He wasn't the lad I spoke to over the telephone. He had an entirely different voice and accent."

"Then what—?"

"Search me," Cal said. "There's a girl who seems plenty worried about something." And, he added enthusiastically, "She's kind of a pretty girl, too."

CAL MERTON had been instructed to report to the New Apostles the next morning. After they ate, he and Imagination Daly moved the trailer out to a convenient side road and parked for the night. They slept there, and the next morning drove back into Fort Madison, which was a railroad town, a division point for one of the transcontinental railways. In addition, the vast Keokuk power dam across the Mississippi River was nearby, and as was natural, numerous factories were located in the neighborhood of this power source. There was a concern manufacturing motion picture cameras and projectors, one producing fountain pens, a company making watches, among others. The watch making plant could be seen to the left as Cal drove into town—several neat red brick buildings on wide green lawns. The Mississippi was beyond, fat with backwater from the power dam, with the green bluffs of Illinois crouching at the far edge.

The New Apostles were set up for the week in a wooded grove near the watch factory, a pleasant spot, with spreading trees, encircling hedge fences and a carpet of bluestem grass.

The camp included a gray tent almost as large as a circus big top. The tent walls were tied up permitting a

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glimpse of rows of neatly varnished folding chairs, and at the back of the tent, a raised rostrum. It might have been a tent show, except that there was nothing gaudy about the layout. Half a dozen trailers and an equal number of trucks stood under the trees. All vehicles bore the same legend:

THE NEW APOSTLES
Missionaries of the True Faith of Peace

Several Apostles moved about. They were shiny, scrubbed-looking men with serene expressions. All wore garments of rough dark homespun cloth, coarse shirts with collars like navy blouses and shoes which were heavy and plain.

An eight o'clock morning whistle blew at the watch factory as Cal stopped the rattling roadster in the New Apostle camp. He found Saint Neeta.

"Good morning," she said with a welcoming smile. Neeta stood in front of a trailer, evidently her quarters, and Cal had to look closely to discern any sign of worry, fear, or horror—he still had not decided which it was—of the night before. The young woman seemed fairly composed, and her smile was pleasant, if a bit firm.

She wore this morning a plain dark frock which showed a lovely column of a throat and gave warming ideas about the rest of her figure. Her cinnamon hair was drawn back with a suggestion of severity. She was such a beauty that Imagination Daly, obviously astounded, stood opening and closing his mouth.

"You understand," Neeta said calmly, "that you are supposed to be two gentlemen who are genuinely interested in our cause and wish to join the New Apostles. I will sponsor you; that will be sufficient to admit you.

"You must be very careful," she warned, "to say nothing to anyone about your real purpose. The moment it is known that you are spies, that will finish your chances of learning much of anything."

"Right." Cal agreed. He was thinking what a charming voice she had.

"I'm not," Neeta smiled, "going to try to convert you two. You are simply here to observe our methods for Professor Smith. You are to report everything that you see to him. *Everything*. Every move made by every Apostle. You understand?"

THERE was one angle to this that didn't sit right; and Cal had slept on it, deciding to get it settled at the first opportunity.

"It is very kind of you to allow Smith to plant observers with your Apostles."

"Thank you," she said.

"It's really an unusual courtesy, I should say," Cal added.

"Not at all. I've known Smith a long time." She held a hand about two feet above the ground. "Ever since I was so high."

Cal grinned. "In that case, I'd think you could save him money by explaining your mind-reading methods to him yourself."

That, of course, was the large 'possum in the log. There were several other things that didn't seem right. But they might be only imagination. Professor Smith could be the Smith who had taken Cal's application for the job over the telephone. Cal didn't think so, but he could be mistaken. Maybe the act with the gun in the hotel room had actually been to test his horse sense. He was willing to

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string along and accept that. But when it came to the idea of Smith hiring a pair of itinerant magicians to learn something the girl should certainly know, he balked. He couldn't be that gullible even for so pretty a girl.

Neeta said, "I was thinking that might puzzle you. But it's simple, really."

"Oh, it is?"

"Professor Smith thinks I'm a religious fanatic," the young woman said. "And he's convinced that what I would tell him might be colored by my own convictions."

"He does, eh?"

"Yes. I've already told him all there is to be told. He isn't satisfied."

"He isn't?"

"Smith doesn't consider," Neeta finished, "that I'm a reliable source of scientific information."

And I, Cal thought to himself, don't consider that you're any Lady George Washington. What you've just told me is not the truth, unless I'm mistaken.

What he said was: "It's all very clear."

Saint Neeta called an apostle and informed him that Cal Merton and Imagination Daly were joining the unit as Disciples, to qualify themselves and later became apostles.

Imagination Daly left with the Apostle, but Cal lingered behind, frankly fascinated by Saint Neeta.

"You haven't introduced me to your husband," he said.

"But, I haven't any," said Neeta.

"Swell. Then there's no reason why I can't take a very pretty mind-reader out riding this gloaming."

"No, thank you," Neeta said.

"You won't go?" he asked.

"That is the general idea," Neeta replied. "Incidentally, what gave you the thought that you were hired as an entertainment committee?"

"Well," said Cal with dignity, "I—"

"Exactly," Neeta said sweetly. "And now, good morning."

"I'm going to remind you of a page in a book," Cal warned.

"How is that?"

"Because you're going to have to turn me down so often to keep me in my place." With which he departed in injured majesty, realizing he hadn't been very witty or very successful.

CHAPTER V

THE WATCHMAKER

CAL MERTON, besides being a long sunburned young man with a spectacular shock of white hair, invariably wore a pleasantly sly smile and a certain eye twinkle. Anybody meeting him expected some kind of a shenanigan. He made friends readily, people sought his company, dogs barked cheerfully at him, and he was invariably the idol of kids in any small town in which he happened to be.

He did not, however, seem to meet favor with the New Apostle to whom Neeta had delegated the job of initiating them. An occasional "Humph!" or a "Follow me, Brother Disciples," was about the extent of this apostle's remarks. He was a small man, a man who would have to stand on tiptoe to look into Cal's vest pocket. Cal was particularly struck by a deep mournful quality in the runty apostle's voice. It reminded him of a foxhound named Old Blow, owned by the newspaper editor in Cal's home town.

Cal and Imagination were supplied with one plain dark suit of homespun, and one plainer worksuit apiece.

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They were given heavy shoes and straight brimmed black hats. After they had changed, they were presented with a can of dull gray paint, two brushes, and instructions to give their gaudy trailer a more evangelistic complexion.

At noon, they were served with good plain food. Cal kept his eyes open, but what he saw seemed to be only routine. The New Apostles had a sound truck, and this was dispatched to Fort Madison and nearby towns in the afternoon to ballyhoo the meeting for that night.

"This looks like a pipe for us," said Imagination. It looked innocent enough, Cal admitted.

Being lazy, Imagination lay down in the shade of a tree about three o'clock and slept until sunset. He awakened to find himself the possessor of an excellent crop of chiggers.

As far as Cal had been able to tell, the New Apostles were a serious, decent crowd, and a credit to their calling. He saw nothing to bear out his sneaking feeling that something was decidedly amiss.

The night crowd—there were no meetings in the afternoon—began assembling early. By eight o'clock there were at least two thousand persons in the tent. Millers and bugs circled the gasoline lanterns which furnished light, and everyone talked. Then, silence. An apostle took the rostrum and gave an invocation; then announced:

"Our Brother Apostle, Harry Curot, will address us tonight."

Cal—he was seated in the audience—craned to get a glimpse of Harry Curot. He had not, he saw, observed the man around before.

Brother Apostle Harry Curot was a lean man with piercing eyes, and a mouth which was large, thick-lipped and mobile, an orator's mouth. His face was gloomy and homely. He had large hands, which he flung about as he talked, and employed in a nervous habit of buttoning and unbuttoning his homespun coat.

"Many are ye who have come seeking understanding," began Harry Curot. "And so let us hope the light of truth shall be shed, and let us banish the shadows that are doubts, and stab unto his mortal end the beast that is fear."

He went on in that vein, talking about fear and disbelief, skeptics, the shallowness of the human mind, and Cal realized before long that he was building up for something that was to come. The speaker knew crowd psychology; he did not try to beat home the feeling he wanted to create with so many direct words, but worked for the general effect. His overly pious phrases were really rather effective. In the course of an hour, he sold the crowd on the idea that plain living, simple habits, and meditation gave a person far more in the line of character and mental ability than one might think.

It occurred to Cal that this was about what he had expected. He could sense the build-up for the mind-reading and knew it would start soon. He felt somehow, disappointed. This feeling was hard to define, and he didn't know whether it was inner resentment that an evangelistic sermon, and a good one, too, should terminate in a mind-reading show.

HIS feeling that something was sour persisted after Curot went into a routine of mind-reading. The apostle had envelopes and cards distributed in the audience. Questions were written on the cards, which were then sealed in the envelopes. The en-

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velopes were collected in a basket, and brought to the rostrum.

Apostle Harry Curot picked up one of the envelopes at random, held it over his head, and, without looking at it, loudly recited the question written inside. Then he proceeded to give advice on the question. Later, the written query was handed back to the one who wrote it.

Cal shrugged impatiently. So this was the kind of stuff Smith had hired him to investigate! That was a laugh. This psychic reading of messages inside sealed envelopes, which Apostle Curot was doing was one of the oldest tricks. Simple stuff. Apostle Curot merely had a stooge in the crowd. That first question had not been sealed in any envelope—it had been planted beforehand on the pulpit in front of Apostle Curot. He had read it while holding a genuine question above his head. Then he had opened the genuine query and dropped it on the pulpit, beside the fake; after giving some pretended oracular advice, he merely picked up the fake and passed it out to the stooge. This left the genuine query open before him on the pulpit, a plant to be read when he selected another envelope at random and held it over his head. Pretending to read the question held up actually he read the one on the pulpit. This piece of hocus pocus was repeated again and again. One of the most moth-eaten stage mind-reading gags known to the profession.

Apostle Curot did have one novelty, though. He clamped his hands over his ears, as if to get greater concentration, then told some of the question writers how old they were, their house numbers, when they purchased a new car, the make, how much they paid for it, what they did for a living, the names of some of their friends. Very impressive. Simple, too. Cal caught, a time or two, a flash of the cord attached to the tiny telephone receiver which Apostle Curot was holding to his ear while pretending to concentrate. Back of the rostrum somewhere, another apostle was doubtless thumbing through a book of local credit ratings—such books could be obtained without too much trouble from the automobile finance companies—and reading the information contained therein.

Cal was disappointed. He had better stuff himself. Not that it wasn't a good act. It was. It amazed the crowd. Certainly, it did them no harm. And the sermon which had preceded the show was stuff that would benefit anyone. It was, Cal decided finally, the coupling of stage hokum with religion that he resented.

Apostle Harry Curot held a final envelope aloft.

"Now, my brethren," he said loudly. "This is the last question, and as a special consideration to the lucky writer, I am going to give him a private and personal reading after our meeting is concluded." Curot tore open the envelope. "The name here is Tucker Cragg. Will he step forward?"

Tucker Cragg, a chunky man wearing spectacles, advanced.

Apostle Harry Curot then made Cal feel a lot more respect toward the apostles as a whole by announcing that the mind-reading he had just enacted was pure entertainment, accomplished by legerdemain, and was not to be taken seriously. Cal grinned. Nice idea. The mind-reading act got a large turnout, and provided an audience for the good sound spiritual advice that the crowd accepted as an incidental.

An offering was taken at this psychological moment, and the meeting ended.

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Tucker Cragg, the man who had received the private reading, was escorted to a trailer by Apostle Harry Curot.

CAL MERTON and Imagination Daly retired to the shelter of a convenient tree to smoke. As disciples, they had learned they weren't supposed publicly to indulge in tobacco.

"Smith must be a lame-brain," Imagination chuckled. "Imagine him paying us to investigate stuff like what we just saw."

Cal was thoughtful. "I wouldn't be too sure."

"Smith is a sucker, Cal. That's all."

"He impressed me as a pretty sharp old buzzard."

"Dang these chiggers!" complained Imagination. "They're sure man-eaters. Say, when do you report to Smith?"

"Tonight."

"Where?"

"Filling station down the road."

"Well," said Imagination, "if you want us to keep this hundred-dollar-a-week snap, you better dress up the truth for Smith."

Cal smoked his cigarette in silence, the glow of burning tobacco spreading a sanguine tint over his pleasantly freckled features. The night was warm, with a few clouds, and by now almost all of the crowd had departed, some walking toward town, and others backing their automobiles to the road. Cal and Imagination finished their smokes, then assisted in extinguishing the gasoline lanterns in the big tent, and in tieing down the side wall. This completed the work for the night.

Cal waited another half hour, then sauntered off alone to keep his first rendezvous with Smith. He wore his black hat.

He walked a short distance along the road, and heard hacking and gagging sounds from the edge of the pavement. He hesitated, listening. One man, from the sound of it. Probably a drunk. But there'd be no harm in making sure.

Cal struck a match. Right, he thought. Some fellow with a load. The fellow was humped over the roadside ditch, being sick. He glanced around as Cal struck the match. A chubby man with neat spectacles.

"Oh, hello," Cal said.

Cal recognized the man. Tucker Cragg. The fellow whose envelope had come up last in the mind-reading—the lucky man who had received a private and personal reading from Apostle Harry Curot.

Tucker Cragg was not, Cal perceived, intoxicated. "Must have had too square a meal for supper," Tucker Cragg said wryly.

"Corners hurting you, eh?" Cal remarked. "You're the man who got the special reading from Brother Curot, aren't you?"

"It didn't turn out so hot."

"No?"

"Nope. You see, the apostle left me alone in a trailer, and I dozed off." He expectorated, shook his head and said *brrrr!* distastefully.

"You dozed off?" Cal suggested.

His eyes were interested.

"Yeah. Reckon it must have been the dang stuff I ate for supper. You know, I'll bet it was that catfish I caught off the watch plant dock this afternoon."

"So you work at the watch factory?" said Cal.

"That's right."

They walked down the road together, Tucker Cragg navigating a little erratically.

Cal inquired, "Didn't Apostle Curot read your mind at all?"

"No. He woke me up and said, as long as I was feeling so tough, I might

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as well come back some other time, or let it slide."

They approached the filling station where Cal had instructions to meet Smith. "I drop off here," Cal explained. "Hope you get to feeling better."

THIS filling station was like a thousand others. A pair of pumps, a brick building, its roof extending over the pumps, arrays of canned oil, tire-repair kits, inner tubes, spark plugs, windshield wipers, soft drink cooler, and so on.

The air hose was at one side, and a small sedan stood there. A fat man squatted down, putting air in the sedan tires. This fat man would have been a passable recruit for a circus. He had curly brown hair, small twinkling eyes, a mouth which seemed to be made for the cigar it held, and innumerable chins. The chins merged with his chest, which expanded and capped a remarkable stomach which the fat man was holding on his chubby knees with one plump pink hand, as if it were a little balloon. He used the other hand to press the hissing air hose on the tire valve.

"Good evening, young man, good evening," volunteered the fat man. "I notice by your garments that you belong to some branch of the clergy, so I presume you are connected with those evangelists who are holding a revival meeting down the road a short distance, and whose tents I noticed while driving past." The fat man said it all without stopping.

Cal looked at him curiously. "That's right," he said, and wondered why the fat man had brought that up.

The plain homespun suit was loose in cut, comfortable, and Cal had already grown accustomed to it to the point of forgetting that its plain severity set him apart.

The fat man said, all in another long sentence, "My name is Derm—T. Packer Derm, and I represent a textile concern qualified to supply a very good grade of homespun such as you are wearing at a price which is doubtless much lower than what you are accustomed to paying, so it is probable that I shall call upon your leader in the morning, and I naturally would appreciate any kind word you might care to speak."

"So," Cal said. "A drummer."

"Yes," said T. Packer Derm.

He went back to putting air in the tire. Cal frowned at the fat bulk. Cal was very interested now.

This fellow was the man to whom Cal had talked when he had answered, by long distance telephone, the advertisement for a mind-reader in the St. Louis newspaper. In Cal's mind was no vestige of doubt. This was Smith! That voice, those long sentences, could not be mistaken. Yes, this was the man who had taken Cal's references.

"Smith!" Cal said.

The air hose slipped, and escaping air made the spitting noise of a big cat. Otherwise, the fat man showed no sign. He did not look up.

"Smith," Cal repeated. "What's the idea of the funny business?"

The fat man finished filling the tire, straightened, looped the air hose over its hook, carefully adjusted his big stomach so that it was partially supported by his belt, then looked around curiously.

"Goodness!" he said surprisedly. "You were not addressing me, by any chance?"

"Drop the act, Smith."

The fat man shrugged, got into the sedan and carefully adjusted his

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paunch so that it fitted under the wheel. He started the motor.

He said, "Keep your mouth shut to strangers, you fool. We'll contact you later."

He put the car in gear. It moved. Cal jumped, grabbed the window. The car rocketed out of the filling station driveway. Cal hung on. The fat man drew a large dark revolver and crashed it down on Cal's fingers. That made it painfully impossible for Cal to cling. He came loose, hit the road, and momentum piled him into the ditch.

The car departed.

Cal got out of the ditch, grimacing and examining the fingers which the fat man had pounded with the gun. They weren't broken, but the pain in them made Cal's breath come and go noisily through his teeth. He held the aching hand—his right—under his left armpit for a while. Then he recovered his dark hat and stalked wrathfully to the filling station.

Smith, the bald old giant, was not at the rendezvous.

IMAGINATION DALY was sitting up on his bunk when Cal entered their trailer. Imagination, in nothing but underwear, was holding a flashlight beam close to his shins, and scratching.

"Now that I've become an evangelist," he muttered, "there ought to be some kind of a curse I could put on chiggers."

Cal, saying nothing, sat on the other bunk and thoughtfully examined his damaged fingers.

"Gosh," said Imagination. "You should be more careful when you bite your fingernails."

Cal snorted.

Imagination sat up straighter. "Hey, you haven't been calling on our little Saint?"

"What," Cal grunted, "gave you that idea?"

"Well, it looks like somebody slapped your fingers for you."

Cal applied mercurochrome to the fingers where the skin was broken. The pain was not so intense now. Cal's expression, as he got into his pajamas, was grimly preoccupied.

"What did Smith have to say?" Imagination wanted to know.

"He didn't show up," Cal said, then came over and sat on Imagination's bunk. "Remember I told you this job smells?"

"It itches, too," Imagination grinned, and scratched his chiggers. "What d'you mean, Cal?"

"I ran into the real Smith, the one I spoke to over the telephone," Cal explained. "He denied being Smith. Then he advised me to keep my mouth shut when I talked to strangers, and said I'd be contacted later. After which he drove off, giving my fingers a whack with a gun when I tried to hang onto the car to get more information."

"Gun!" Imagination popped up straight. "Gun, did you say?" Imagination Daly was scared of guns.

"Go to sleep," Cal advised. "There's no use getting a headache trying to figure it out. But there's something queer going on here."

Imagination groaned from deep down inside and whacked his pillow viciously. "Jeepers," he moaned. "Jeepers creepers." He lay staring up at the tent ceiling.

Cal lay on his own bunk, but the throbbing in his fingers helped his thoughts to keep him awake. His mind wrestled with the situation, and he felt he was reaching very few definite conclusions, considering that he was a magician, and therefore supposedly versed in all things mysterious. He

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doubted very much if he and Imagination had been hired merely to learn how genuine was the mind-reading ability of the New Apostles. That had seemed false from the first. He mentally reviewed his first meeting with Saint Neeta in the hotel. She'd held that gun and acted as though she belonged to some gang to which she thought he belonged. Now, why had she done that? To learn how much horse sense he had? That was wacky. It didn't ring true. It was wrong. The girl was worried about something. Yes, worried.

Cal turned over on the bunk and jammed his head into the pillow. The girl was in trouble. She was an exquisitely pretty girl, as desirable a creature as the Marvelous Merton had encountered, and she'd disturbed him inside the moment he saw her. Right away, he'd had a fool Galahad urge to be of service. He'd given in to it, too. There was no use denying that. It accounted for his being here now, when he knew very well that several things weren't what they seemed. He blew warm breath against the pillow. Fine note, this! Inveigled into possible trouble by a pretty face. But she *was* sweet . . .

Imagination growled continually and scratched his shins. "How could these chiggers be worse!" he complained.

"They might chirp," Cal suggested.

CHAPTER VI

HORROR IN A BOX

CAL MERTON got up the next morning determined to interview Saint Neeta at the first opportunity and see what he could get from her in the line of facts. In the meantime, he acted like an innocent disciple, and carried it off neatly enough, too, because being a magician, he was vocationally prepared for not showing what he was thinking. First step in his training as a baffler had been the acquisition of ability to hide what he was thinking, and seem to be doing what he was not doing. He put this skill into operation as the day progressed, and while playing the part of a genuinely devout Disciple, he kept his eyes open for a chance to confer with Saint Neeta. The day passed, however, without any opportunity presenting itself. Saint Neeta was about, but he failed to catch her alone.

He was leaning against a tree, watching her with considerable enthusiasm, when he observed the small apostle with houndlike voice watching *him*. The runt was scowling. He ambled off, and Cal saw him talking earnestly with Apostle Harry Curot. The nature of their discussion was evident when Apostle Curot later took Cal aside.

"Brother Disciple Merton," said Apostle Harry Curot severely. "It behooves me to convey to you a few words of essential advice."

Brother Disciple Merton thought the pious phrases were somewhat comical, and he grinned at Apostle Curot. The grin, however, abruptly lost its vim. Apostle Harry Curot had a face which became its most impressive at close range. It was a firm, puritanical face, and after he looked at Curot for a while, Cal found himself thinking of Dracula.

"Yes, Brother Apostle," Cal said soberly.

"We of the New Apostles are plain men, dwelling in simplicity close to the soil, and the desires of the flesh are an evil that must be put out of our minds."

Cal understood. He said, "I don't understand."

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"Cast not thy covetous glance upon our Saint Neeta," said Apostle Harry Curot grimly. "Is that clear?"

Curot stalked away.

Imagination Daly, who had obviously overheard, sidled up. "That guy," he said, "has a face that would crack rocks."

But most of the New Apostles, Cal decided, were pretty nice fellows. They did not indulge in pious phraseology, and they seemed to enjoy themselves. Apostle Harry Curot, as Cal learned later that day, was one of the mainsprings of the New Apostles, and in charge of this touring unit. He was disliked, but not totally. He had his followers—four or five with this unit, among them the runt with the hound voice.

Cal saw no sign of the bald giant, Smith, although he casually visited the filling station, ostensibly for a coke, during the afternoon.

The night meeting conducted by the New Apostles proved to be essentially like the one of the previous evening, although Apostle Harry Curot varied his mind-reading routine slightly, using, however, standard stage tricks throughout. There was nothing that would baffle anyone who knew even the elementals of professional mind-reading.

Cal thought about that a little—and wondered. What had Smith really wanted—and where on earth had he got to, anyway?

There was just one variation. Apostle Harry Curot did not give a private reading to anyone after the main performance.

AT midnight, all became quiet, and Cal crept unseen through the darkness and gave two cautious raps on Neeta's trailer.

"Oh," she said, after opening the door.

"May I come in?" Cal inquired. "It's rather important."

"Why—of course," she said, hesitating.

She seemed a little nervous.

She closed the door after he entered, then faced him. Cal found her somewhat more than breathtaking, for she was not attired in her usual dark homespun frock. She wore instead a negligee of rich gray over silk pajamas. Her cinnamon hair was caught back by a gold band, and she evidently had been enjoying a cigarette, because one lay under a curl of smoke on an ashtray.

Cal was so relieved that he was temporarily speechless. This was a warm girl who liked bright things, and was quite human. She was delightful.

"Do you," Neeta inquired, "have to stare?"

"I'm hypnotized," Cal explained cheerfully.

After her eyes had widened and then narrowed, "Did you come here in a trance?" she asked. "Or have you something to tell me?" Cal took a deep breath and tried to get his thoughts organized along businesslike channels.

"I'm going to be frank," he said. "I'd hate to fall down on this job, but I may do so unless things are cleared up."

"I—I do not understand."

"You're in trouble, girl," Cal said impulsively. "How on earth can I help you unless I know what I'm supposed to be doing?"

She studied him and he could see deep in her warm brown eyes the fear that he had seen at the hotel. She was worried, not the slightest doubt. Frightened, too. Eureka! She was going to talk! Going to trust him! He could tell that from the way her shoulders relaxed, and the slight dip of her chin.

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"It wasn't my idea not to tell you," she said suddenly.

"No?"

She nodded. "You remember when you first met me in the hotel? I pretended that I thought we were both members of the same gang?"

"Yes," Cal said. "And I've never been able to quite figure that out."

She shrugged. "Smith wanted to test you, just on the chance you might have been sent by—by someone." Her brown eyes regarded him apologetically. "I tried to lay it on thick enough there at the hotel to scare you away. But it didn't—didn't work."

"Why try to scare me?"

"Because," said the young woman grimly, "this is dangerous."

"Eh?"

"Very dangerous."

"Great grief!" Cal exploded. "Why not tell me, then?"

"Smith and Derm told me not to do it. They said we had to have someone, and that you might not do it if you knew the truth."

Cal swallowed. He was astounded. "How about telling me now?"

She nodded. "Yes, I—" She went silent, listened. Cal heard it, too. Footsteps of several men approaching.

"Quick!" Neeta gasped.

She put her small, white, very strong hands against his shoulder blades and propelled him forward. Cal did not protest or resist.

A larger locker occupied the forward right corner of the trailer. Swiftly, Neeta bustled Cal into that, then shut the door on him. He found himself among pleasantly perfumed feminine garments, able to stand erect and breathe through ventilating slits in the door, but unable to see a thing.

A knock on the trailer door. Neeta opened it.

"I want to talk to you," growled Apostle Harry Curot's voice.

"I'm sorry," Neeta said only coolly. "But I'm about to retire—"

"This won't keep!" snapped Curot.

THERE was a small gasp from the girl, and Cal realized that Apostle Curot had forced himself into the trailer. Curot grunted orders which evidently meant that whoever had accompanied him was to wait outside.

"Sit down," said Curot to Neeta. The way he said it made Cal's arm muscles get hard. Some day he'd find out if his fists wouldn't crack Apostle Harry Curot's jaw. Not now, though. Neeta was an evangelist, and if her followers found a new male Disciple in her trailer, it might not help her reputation much.

"What do you want?" Neeta asked sharply. "Make it brief, please."

"It'll be brief," Curot growled. "You've doublecrossed me!"

"I'm sure—"

"Save the denials." Curot wasn't using pious talk now. "A week ago, you got some ideas about me. You figured I was using the New Apostles for a little racket of my own. That's why you came along with this traveling unit. You wanted to watch me. You did. And you found out some stuff. Not much. But enough."

There was a scuffling sound.

Curot was growling viciously, and Cal could hear every word. He listened hard for this was the stuff he'd wanted to know.

"I took a measure to keep you from going to the police," Curot grated.

A horrified gasp escaped Neeta at that remark. Cal, on the verge of pitching out of the locker, realized in time that it was only the shock of remembering something that Curot had

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done which made her emit the sound.

"You seem to remember the measure I took," Curot said grimly. "It's tough, sister, that you didn't keep your mouth shut, as you promised."

Neeta gasped, "Curot, I—"

"I know what you done!" Curot interrupted. "I had my men follow you. You called in two private detectives. *Two* detectives, damn you. They were old friends of your family, and they were on a vacation down in the Ozarks."

Neeta tried a brave bluff. "Whatever makes you think—"

"Two private sleuths," Curot interrupted. "Old family friends. Used to come down and go fishing around Lake of the Ozarks, didn't they?"

"You're mad!" Neeta gasped.

"You're damn right I'm mad. I've seen those two snoopers down in the Ozarks."

"You are mistaken!"

"Not a chance."

"But—"

"The detectives are named Smith and Derm. Smith is a bald buzzard. Derm is a fat lug."

Curot swore in a way that made Cal want to gag him by knocking his head off.

"I recognized the pair, all right. They had a hunch I would, too. They knew I'd seen 'em visiting your father."

Neeta gasped, "Please—"

"The two detectives have been hanging around town. They're too smart to come out here. They knew I'd recognize 'em. So they're keeping under cover."

All of this was interesting news to Cal Merton, enlightening in fact, and the affair began to sound pretty unpleasant. Neeta had said dangerous. This Apostle Curot was no pious-talking fanatic, as he had seemed, but a vicious rascal who had been caught doing something. And he was holding some kind of a threat over Neeta to keep her from going to the police. But Neeta had called in two private detectives, old friends.

Cal began to feel as though the solid trailer floor was sinking under him, for he abruptly understood a great deal. Whew! Good grief! The detectives had hired himself and Imagination to spy on Curot. That was it, and all the stuff about Professor Smith wanting reports on the mind-reading methods of the Apostles was bunk. Cal recalled that his orders had been to report everything he saw—everything. That could only mean that he and Imagination, without knowing what they were doing, had been employed to dig up evidence against Apostle Curot. The idea of being inveigled into spying on Apostle Curot was one Cal found disturbing. Not that he didn't want to see Apostle Curot get justice. On the contrary. But what Cal resented was being put into a dangerous situation without his own knowledge. Why in the devil hadn't Detectives Smith and Derm told him what was up? Neeta, a few minutes ago, had said something that now became important. She'd said that the truth had been withheld from Cal because Smith and Derm had been afraid he wouldn't take the job if he knew what it really was. A fine trick to play! A dandy trick!

IT was some consolation to know that Neeta hadn't approved of the deception. It had been all Smith and Derm's doing. Probably they figured Cal and Imagination wouldn't be in any danger. Either that, or being detectives, they were so accustomed to danger that they considered it didn't

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amount to much. Still, they thought it was bad enough that they were keeping out of sight.

That private sleuths Smith and Derm had good reason for keeping under cover was revealed by Curot's next statement. "The two dicks are going into the river in gunnysacks," said Curot fiercely. Neeta made a choking sound, and Curot added, "There'll be plenty of rocks in the sacks."

Neeta cried, "Curot, you don't dare—"

"Shut up!" ordered Curot. "You're going to keep quiet, and now I'll show you why." Curot then opened the door, judging by the sounds, and his harsh voice gave an order.

"Bring it in, boys. Put it on the floor."

A number of men entered the trailer, their grunts indicating they were carrying something heavy. This thumped heavily when they placed it on the trailer floor, then Curot directed the men to go back outdoors, and they did.

"Look it over, Neeta," Curot told the girl. "I'm going to give you about five minutes to do some deep thinking. We'll be close outside, so don't try yelling."

He left, and banged the door shut behind him.

Cal waited, uncertain what he should do, although he wanted greatly to know what it was that the men had brought and placed on the floor. He wondered if Neeta would open the locker door, or would she think of that. She was being very quiet, now . . .

There was a choking sound. Next a clank as of wood on wood. Then a thud, as if the girl had fallen. . . .

Cal opened the locker door, which fortunately could be opened from the inside, and stepped out. Neeta was a limp shape on the floor, lying on her side, with her shoulders twisted, one arm under her side and the other arm contorted back under her neck. Her eyes were closed, and her lips were parted terribly, her features paler than ashes.

Beside her on the floor reposed a wooden box. It was almost square, about four feet each dimension, except the height, which was not more than two and a half feet.

There was a hinged lid, but that was closed. Cal knew now that he had heard it drop shut—that had been the clank of wood on wood which had preceded by a moment the girl's collapse.

Cal was moving toward the box when he heard Curot's hand on the knob of the trailer door.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

SWEET AS HONEY
Sweet as a well-seasoned pipe; on the first smoke! And the honey-curing *keeps* it sweet. Special attachment supplies (1) automatic free draft (2) double action condenser. The best pipe you can buy for $1. Nothing else has its flavor.
CURED WITH HONEY
$1
YELLO-BOLE

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MEN of
PLENTY of HEART!
MANY ARE THE TALES OF COURAGE OF THE GRAND BANKS FISHERMEN AND THE BEST OF THE LOT IS THE SAGA OF HOWARD BLACKBURN, OLD TIMER OF NOVA SCOTIA. ONE DAY, 300 MILES OFF THE COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND, BLACKBURN AND HIS DORY MATE LEFT A VESSEL TO HAUL IN TRAWLS. BEFORE THEY COULD START BACK TO THE MOTHER SHIP THEY WERE CAUGHT IN THE DREADED ENEMY OF DORYMEN— SNOW!
Howard Blackburn
(FROM A PAINTING BY MARY BROWNE)
.... IT GREW COLDER AND THEY WERE UNABLE TO SEE THEIR SHIP. THE NEXT MORNING IT WAS GONE! WITH HIS PAL BAILING CONTINOUSLY BLACKBURN SET OUT TO ROW THEM TO SHORE.
HIS HANDS BEGAN TO FREEZE SO HE CURLED THEM AROUND THE OARS AND LET THEM FREEZE THAT WAY! HIS FEET FROZE, THEN HIS PAL DIED. FOR 5 DAYS BLACKBURN, WITH HANDS AND FEET FROZEN, WITH NO FOOD OR WATER, ROWED UNTIL HE LANDED WITH THE BODY OF HIS PAL ON THE COAST! HE LOST HIS FINGERS AND TOES, BUT HIS STORY IS TOLD WITH PRIDE THROUGHOUT NOVA SCOTIA

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DARING
SIX TO ONE!
HE WENT STREAKING UP TO BATTLE AND FLAMING DOWN TO DEATH—FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS IN A FOREIGN LAND—
—CHINA.
IT WAS IN 1932. THREE JAPANESE BOMBERS PROTECTED BY 3 PURSUIT PLANES APPEARED OVER SOOCHOW AND BEGAN TO BOMB THE HELPLESS COMMUNITY. SUDDENLY A LONE CHINESE PLANE WAS SEEN CLIMBING TO BATTLE THE JAPS. IN THIS PLANE WAS YOUNG BOB SHORT, AN AMERICAN.
ROBERT SHORT
...A WEEK BEFORE HE HAD DOWNED AN ENEMY BOMBER. IN THE FURIOUS BATTLE THAT NOW FOLLOWED HE KILLED AN OBSERVER AND WOUNDED A JAPANESE PILOT. BUT THE ODDS WERE TOO GREAT, —SHORT CAME DOWN IN FLAMES.
HIS BODY WAS TAKEN INTO A HUT BY PEASANTS. THEY PLACED AT THEIR HEROES FEET BOWLS OF RICE AND FISH—THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFTS IN THEIR POWER TO BESTOW, AS THEY WERE STARVING. LATER HE WAS GIVEN A MILITARY FUNERAL AND OVER A MILLION CHINESE ATTENDED.
AND THE CHINESE SCHOOL CHILDREN SAVED THEIR PENNIES TO BUILD A LASTING MEMORIAL TO THIS SEATTLE, WASH., LAD'S MEMORY.
STOOKIE ALLEN

Next Week: Knud Rasmussen—Modern Viking

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A New Novel of Mystery and Romance Start it now—

Red Snow at Darjeeling

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

THE great commercial empire which Alexander Blenn had ruthlessly builded in India was by no means tottering; but it was, to the mind of Alexander Blenn, in danger. Half the northern gateways to India, as he put it, were off their hinges. From the headquarters of the new Chinese Communist Armies, airplanes could cross Tibet in less than two hours; every Russian tea planter in Shimalghar—that independent state in the Himalayas north of Darjeeling, one of the "gateways to India" —was, in the opinion of Blenn, an officer in the Soviet Army; and the German perfume consortium that had just sent men to Shimalghar to hunt the musk deer was likewise, he was firmly convinced, only a blind for a Nazi mission of diplomats and Air Force experts. In other words, somebody beside England was about to establish an air base in Shimalghar—the Nawab's agreement with England to the contrary—and from Shimalghar it was only two hours by bombing plane to Calcutta.

There remained but one thing for Alexander Blenn to do, in order to save India for the British, and particularly for himself: he must establish his own air base in Shimalghar, stocking it with his own planes. Fortunately, he already had a concession from the Nawab permitting him to do this; but unfortunately, the concession

This story began in last week's Argosy

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was due to expire within a week and the Nawab was hedging. But Alexander Blenn had come into possession of a negative which portrayed the Nawab in conference with foreign diplomats, and which the Nawab was most anxious did not fall into the hands of the British government. If Blenn could send a man to Darjeeling to arrange a trade of negative for concession, all would be well with Blenn and Britain.

That was why Blenn had called young Paul Woodring to Calcutta.

"You talk, Mr. Blenn," said Woodring when Blenn had explained all this to him, "as though it will be a simple matter to get the extension of the concession. Will it?"

Alexander Blenn smiled. It was a smug, defiant smile. "Yes," he said. "Very simple. And very dangerous."

But Woodring agreed to take the job.

WOODRING finds, though, that it isn't even going to be simple to get out of Calcutta. First off Hubertson, Blenn's chief engineer, and above all Basil Stiller, his general manager, are opposed to the plan. Stiller, who in addition to his position is also engaged to be married to pretty Ruth Ingram, Blenn's niece and heiress, is very much opposed, insists that the British authorities should be told everything.

Woodring, having procured the negative and a copy of the original concession, is in his hotel room preparing to entrain for Darjeeling, and being subjected to the presence of the mysterious and apparently drunken Henry Emmet-Tansley, when he gets a frantic note from Ruth Ingram telling him that something has happened to her uncle. On his way to the Blenn house he is attacked and the papers stolen from him. He gets sight of one of his attackers —and it is Basil Stiller!

As if this were not enough, he arrives at Blenn's to find that the empire-builder has disappeared. Ruth tells him that shortly before his disappearance her uncle had received a telegram, and had seemed, of all emotions for Alexander Blenn to show, terrified by the information it contained! The telegram, Ruth says, read something about "The Walls of Jericho have arisen from ruins and the hosts of vengeance are on the march."

This ties up, but not very coherently, with Woodring's observation that the original concession, made twenty years before, was signed not only by Blenn but also by one Christopher Jericho, now unknown.

SINCE Woodring knows that Stiller has engineered the theft of the papers, he also suspects the man of some hand in Blenn's disappearance. One trip to Stiller's nearby rooms availing him nothing, he tries again, this time finds the door unlocked. The place has been ransacked and there is blood on the floor.

He decides now that he will have to go counter to Blenn's orders and call in the police. This he directs Ruth to do, while he plans to go on to Darjeeling, thinking he may yet find the answer to the mystery there.

TO INSPECTOR Leonidas M. Prike, C. I. D., the smallest matter is worthy of attention. He even listens to the plaint of the German botanist Feurmann, who, about to embark for Darjeeling, complains that his camera has been stolen and will be used against him in some mysterious way by the Nazis. But what really gets Inspector Prike out of his lodgings ere his breakfast is well digested, is the news Deputy Inspector Robbins brings him of the disappearance of Alexander Blenn.

He, too, goes to Basil Stiller's rooms, finds the blood on the floor. He also finds, through servants from the adjoining house, that someone, supposedly Stiller's Hindu servant, has died in the night of a "heart attack" and been taken to the crematorium. He rushes to the nearest crematorium. inspects the bodies recently brought there. The last one, supposedly that of a Hindu woman, he finds to be not, after all, the body of Alexander Blenn.

It is instead the body of Basil Stiller.

CHAPTER VI

CANDID CAMERA

STANLEY HUBERTSON called at the Blenn house half an hour after Inspector Prike had left for Elysium Row. The soft spoken, white-haired engineering superintendent was

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deeply concerned as he came to offer his services to Ruth Ingram, genuinely sympathetic when he learned that nothing had yet been heard from Alexander Blenn.

"I have been thinking, Miss Ingram," he said, "that perhaps the police should be notified."

"They have been notified," said the girl. "Inspector Prike was here this morning. I'm glad you approve."

Hubertson nodded gravely.

"I do, indeed," he said. "I should have suggested it last night, were it not for the fact that your uncle was anxious to be free of possible police interference in—in a certain matter now pending."

"I know. But Mr. Woodring himself decided that it was time the police be informed."

Again Hubertson nodded. "Then young Woodring is going on to Darjeeling, regardless of—of last night's mysterious developments?"

"Certainly. Mr. Woodring received his final instructions just before Uncle Alex disappeared, and after all nothing has happened to indicate that my uncle would want his plans changed."

"Stout fellow, this young Woodring," Hubertson declared. "I doubt if we could find a better man for this mission to Darjeeling. What do you think, Miss Ingram?"

"My uncle has a genius for choosing capable men," the girl said. "By the way, Mr. Hubertson, I carefully avoided mentioning Mr. Woodring to Inspector Prike."

"Good girl." Hubertson patted Ruth's hand gently, paternally. "Very wise. You have some of your uncle's shrewdness. You have—" He paused, moved to the window. "Inspector Prike has come back," he announced.

The sound of a running motor was broken by the slamming of a car door. Footsteps tramped up the outside stairs. An instant later Prike, Robbins and two constables entered.

"Glad you're here, Hubertson," said Prike, nodding to the white-haired engineer. "I'd just sent for you."

"Then you have news of Mr. Blenn?"

"Not of Blenn," said Prike. He was looking at Ruth Ingram. For an instant his eyes softened with a blur of compassion, but the incongruous touch of humanity immediately disappeared from his grimly businesslike expression. "Miss Ingram," he said. "I believe you were engaged to marry Basil Stiller."

"Were? I am . . ." The girl suddenly sank into a chair. She sat tensely on the very edge, leaning forward with dread expectancy. At last she managed to ask: "Has something happened to Basil?"

"Stiller," the inspector announced quietly, "has been murdered."

THE girl did not move. Stunned, she stared silently at Prike. Her lips parted, as the gradual realization of his words entered her understanding. Yet the emotion that widened her clear blue eyes was not grief—shock, certainly, but no sorrow.

"Murdered," she repeated, as though talking to herself.

"Shot through the heart," Prike continued. "Killed in his own drawing room."

"When—when was this, Inspector?" asked Hubertson in horrified tones. He removed his pince-nez to wipe the humidity from the lenses, and his wax-like hands trembled.

"Before midnight," Prike replied. "The police surgeon says the condition of the body indicates death occurred

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between ten and twelve o'clock last night. At what time did Mr. Blenn telephone you, Hubertson?"

"At ten o'clock, approximately."

"And he was telephoning from Stiller's flat?"

"That's what he said, yes. I had no reason for doubting it—although when I tried to telephone Stiller at about midnight, I got no answer. I admit my suspicions should have been aroused, particularly in view of the quarrel yesterday afternoon . . ."

"What quarrel?" Prike demanded sharply.

Hubertson hesistated. He fumbled with his eyeglasses in an effort to cover his embarrassment at having made a verbal slip. He avoided the eyes of Ruth Ingram.

"Why it was nothing, really," he murmured. "Mr. Stiller and Mr. Blenn had a spirited discussion of a business matter. But then they frequently disagreed on questions of policy . . ."

Ruth Ingram asked: "Have you any clue to the murderer, Inspector?"

Prike shook his head. "Stiller was shot at close range," he said. "The fatal wound was ringed with powder particles blasted into the skin. The only clue I have as yet is an empty thirty-two caliber cartridge found in Stiller's rooms. Of course the autopsy surgeon will recover the bullet itself, from which our ballistic experts should be able to tell us much. I hope, also, to locate the Hindus who smuggled the body away from Elysium Row in an effort to dispose of it at the burning *ghat* on Tolly's Nallah."

"Burning *ghat!* How ghastly!"

"And now, Miss Ingram, I shall ask your permission to examine the apartments and belongings of Mr. Blenn," said Prike.

"No." The girl arose, pale and defiant. "You have no right, Inspector—"

"I have every right," interrupted Prike. "If you insist, I shall of course be forced to secure the proper warrants from the courts. However, I should think you would be anxious to coöperate with me in uncovering any evidence which might clear your uncle of the suspicion which present circumstances seem to cast upon him. Do you insist upon a warrant, Miss Ingram?"

The girl did not reply. Prike accepted her silence as resignation. He nodded approvingly.

"Thank you, Miss Ingram," he said. "Come along, Robbins."

The girl climbed the stairs behind the dapper little inspector and his large, beefy deputy. She stood in the doorway while Prike began his examination of Alexander Blenn's study.

After a general survey, Prike picked up a heavy trash container of Burdwan bell-metal, and carefully sorted the contents. He discarded everything except a folded copy of *The Times,* from one page of which a rectangular piece of paper had been cut. After frowning at the newspaper a moment, he devoted his attention to the sandalwood desk. He tried the drawers, found them locked.

"Have you the keys, Miss Ingram?" he asked.

"My uncle always carried his keys with him. I doubt if there are any duplicates," was the reply.

"Then I'll smash open the drawers, Inspector," Robbins volunteered.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Robbins," said Prike reprovingly. "I refuse to ruin such a magnificent specimen of Travancore marquetry. Look at the superb carving of the plantain-blossom motive at the corners; and the ivory inlay of the *bô*-leaf pattern. Go get me a locksmith, Robbins."

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"Right off, Inspector."

"One moment, Robbins. With your usual thoroughness, I assume that you've already been after the post office people regarding the telegram that Miss Ingram says her uncle received last evening."

"Yes, sir. I've two men working on it now, sir. They should have a report shortly."

"Hurry it along, then. And on your way back, Robbins, get me a copy of this number of *The Times,* which apparently came in with the last mail from London. I'm curious to know just what Mr. Blenn has cut out of this one."

DURING the next half hour, Prike busied himself with an examination of Blenn's wardrobe and personal effects. He had found nothing of apparent importance by the time Robbins returned with the locksmith and the home newspaper.

The inspector turned immediately to the page from which Blenn had cut an article, and read the following short paragraphs:

> Metropolitan Police have been asked to aid in the search for one Christopher Jericho, who has been missing for ten days from a private nursing home in Thornton Heath.
>
> Jericho, a former mechanical engineer and inventor, suffered a mental breakdown fifteen years ago following a long and arduous career in India. He was adjudged insane and committed to an asylum. However, last year he was believed partly cured and asylum officials authorized his transfer to the nursing home from which he escaped.
>
> His description: Height, 5 ft. 11 in.; weight, about 10 stone; brown eyes, gray thinning hair; age, 60. When last seen, he was wearing a blue serge suit and a bowler hat.

Deputy Inspector Robbins waited until Prike had finished reading, then handed him a telegraph blank.

"And here's the original of that message Mr. Blenn got last night," he said.

Prike studied the uneven, slightly-shaky scrawl which spelled the text:

RUINED JERICHO HAS RISEN AGAIN TO POUR FORTH HOSTS OF VENGEANCE

"It was sent from Kipperpore," Robbins explained. "My men found the telegraph *babu* who accepted it. He said a *chaprassi* from the P. & O. jetty brought it in, with a silver half-crown to pay for it. A *sahib* gave it to him, the *chaprassi* said. The *babu* took the English money and paid for the telegram out of his own pocket, because the rate on inland telegrams is only twelve annas, and the half-crown was worth two rupees. Does that help any, Inspector?"

"Definitely," Prike declared. "The half-crown would indicate that the sender of the telegram had arrived so recently from England that he had as yet no time to change his money. A P & O. liner from home docked in the Hooghly late yesterday afternoon. And while the sailings direct to Calcutta take about ten days longer than the mail via Bombay which brought the last newspapers, *The Times* reports that the mental patient named Jericho had escaped from the nursing home ten days previous to publication. Therefore the ruined Jericho which has risen to pour forth hosts of vengeance might very well be a Mr. Christopher Jericho, just arrived in Calcutta. At any rate, the mere announcement of the hosts of vengeance was sufficient to throw Alexander Blenn into a blue funk. Why?"

"I wouldn't know, Inspector."

"We must find out, Robbins. The locksmith seems to have finished. Let's have a look at the desk."

Inspector Prike sat down, began

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going through the drawers. He sorted through a sheaf of papers, discarded them after a cursory glance. He found nothing to engage his attention for more than a few seconds until he came across a 5 x 7 photographic print.

From the slight straightening of the inspector's shoulders as he lay the photograph on the desk and studied it for a long moment, Robbins knew that something had clicked in Prike's alert mind. He leaned closer to see what it was.

"Not what you'd call handsome, are they, Inspector?" was the deputy's comment. "Look as if they might have criminal records."

"The old man with the beard," said Prike, "is the Nawab of Shimalghar."

"Does that mean anything?" Robbins asked.

"Possibly," Prike answered, "in view of the fact that this is a bromide print, and apparently enlarged from a fine-grain film of the type used in miniature cameras. Now the camera which our distressed friend Herr Doktor Feurmann—Hello, what's this?"

PRIKE had reached into the back of a drawer, pulled out a camera. It was a small, compact piece of apparatus that scarcely more than covered the palm of his hand. The lens that stared up from the center of the camera seemed large in proportion to the size of the instrument. Prike examined it carefully.

"Make a note of this number, Robbins," he said. "Schnell-Ultra lens *f*/1:5, No. 25534. I want the owner traced as quickly as possible. You may have to begin with the factory records in Germany. In that case, use the transoceanic telephone."

"I have it, Inspector. Now, about this chap Feurmann—"

"Yes, I know. You've had him followed."

"Well, yes," admitted Robbins, a little sheepishly. "I thought maybe, just in case—"

"Don't apologize, Robbins. I'm quite aware of your admirable distrust of my unorthodox methods and lack of thoroughness. Well, has the Herr Doktor done anything of note this morning?"

"He's bought his ticket for Darjeeling," said Robbins. "But I'll see he doesn't use it."

"Let him go, Robbins," said Prike. "Now listen carefully. Your program for today will consist of the following: First, you're to make every effort to locate the servants of the late Basil Stiller, supposedly on holiday. Second, you're to continue the search for the men who brought Stiller's body to the burning *ghat*. Third, try to locate a man who answers the description of Christopher Jericho, a man who might have arrived by P. & O. liner yesterday, either as passenger, member of the crew, or stowaway."

Deputy Inspector Robbins was writing industriously in a small notebook. Prike, seated, emphasized each point by jabbing the air with an unlighted cigarette. He was not, however, looking at Robbins, but at Ruth Ingram who stood against the wall, still very pale.

"Fourth, Inspector?" prompted Robbins.

"Fourth, you'll find the *chaprassi* who carried the original telegram from the P. & O. jetty. Fifth, you'll get me samples of the handwriting of all persons intimately associated with Alexander Blenn. Sixth—"

There were sounds of rapid footsteps on the stairway. A constable burst into the room, holding a salmon-colored envelope.

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"Telegram," he announced, "for Miss Ruth Ingram."

The girl reached for the envelope, but Prike's deft fingers were quicker than hers.

"Give it to me!" she demanded. "It may be a personal matter."

"In that case, you'll have to trust to my professional discretion," said Prike, opening the telegram.

His expression did not change as he announced: "You'll be relieved to hear, Miss Ingram, that your uncle is alive and apparently well. He telegraphs you from Santahar as follows: 'Please give Woodring any further telegrams addressed to me today.' Who is Woodring, Miss Ingram?"

The girl hesitated. Her eyes avoided Prike as she said: "Why, I—I believe Mr. Woodring is an employe of my uncle's, stationed somewhere in the Punjab."

"Apparently Mr. Woodring is now in Calcutta," Prike insisted. "And apparently your uncle believes you know where to reach him."

"Naturally." The girl faced Prike at last. "Any employe of Uncle Alex can be reached through the Blenn offices in Clive Street."

Prike absent-mindedly handed the telegram to Ruth Ingram.

"Santahar," he mused, "is on the main line to Darjeeling?" His voice trailed off as he seemed lost in thought. He did not speak for a moment.

"And sixth, Inspector?" prompted Robbins, whose pencil was still poised above his notebook.

"And sixth," snapped Prike, roused instantly from his cogitation, "if you finish the other business by eight-sixteen o'clock, Robbins, you will join me at Sealdah Station. I think it quite likely that we shall be running up to Darjeeling on tonight's Mail."

CHAPTER VII

BLACK VELVET

WHEN Paul Woodring judged that the offices of the Eastern Bengal Railway would be open, he went to Koilaghat Street and bought his ticket for Darjeeling. Then he returned to his hotel to clean up. He was taking off the tatters of his shirt when he heard someone stirring in the bathroom. He tip-toed to the door and was amazed to see a strange Indian youth calmly setting out his shaving things.

The strange youth turned, and Woodring saw that he was very thin and very black, with a Dravidian cast of features. He wore a white *dhoti* and a frayed khaki coat that was nearly white from many washings. A pillbox cap of astrakhan perched jauntily above his black, pockmarked forehead.

"Salaam, Sahib!" said the youth respectfully.

"Who in hell are you?" Woodring demanded.

"Am *sahib's* bearer," was the reply.

"You're not my bearer. Where's Ram Das?"

"Ram Das being misfortunately retracted to Punjab, has elected me for his *badli.*"

"That's not true," said Woodring. "Ram Das said nothing to me about a substitute."

"True, *sahib.* Ram Das made departure of utmost suddenness, having report that wife and three children prostrated by grave aches and pains. Ram Das had great desire for informing *sahib,* but *sahib* was absenting self from rooms during night-time."

"Ram Das wouldn't have left without collecting his fare home," Woodring insisted.

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"Ram Das will employ *munshi* to write *sahib* instructing where rear salaries may be sent," said the black youth. "In meanwhiles, I am advancing Ram Das one rail ticket for Delhi, third class. Total, ten rupees, one anna, six pie."

"So you're a banker, too," said Woodring. "What's your name?"

"Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram."

Woodring smiled in spite of himself. He knew the type, now. A Christianized Tamil from the French possessions in Southern India.

"With that illustrious name," he said, "you're from Pondichery, naturally."

"No, *sahib*. Not naturally," said Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram. "Naturally am from Karikal, but unnaturally am Pondichery man because of Jesuit schooling."

"You didn't learn that amazing English at a Jesuit school," Woodring said.

"No, *sahib*. At Jesuit school was learning French. Perfected English resulting from knowledge pursued from American Presbyterian Mission academy at Kodai Kanal. Also from slight curriculum at Madura Church Mission. Am complete Christian, embracing all gospels and sexes. Also am speaking somewhat Urdu, Bengali, Canarese and Telugu."

"And Tamil."

"And Tamil, *sahib*. We are leaving today, *sahib?*"

"Leaving?" Woodring's eyes narrowed as his amusement gave way to renewed suspicion.

"Ram Das informed that *sahib* was traveling to Darjeeling," said Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram.

"Ram Das was misinformed," snapped Woodring. "Furthermore, any traveling I do will be light. I won't need a bearer."

"But *sahib!*" The black youth unbuttoned his khaki coat, produced a stack of greasy, dog-eared papers. "Am servant of great excellence and training. Will serve the *sahib* with intense skill. Have chits—"

"Chits of reference," said Woodring, waving away the letters, "may be purchased for four annas apiece from almost any *munshi*. Sorry, Georges, but I'm not having any."

"Am therefore discharged, *sahib?*" A look of extreme melancholy crossed the lean, black face.

"You're simply not engaged," said Woodring. "I told you I've decided I won't need a bearer."

The Tamil wagged his head. Then, "There is a small matter of ten ruppees, one anna, six pie, advanced to Ram Das. . . ."

"Very well," Woodring tossed out a banknote. "Goodbye, Georges."

"Thank you, *sahib*. Perhaps some other time, *sahib*."

Woodring walked to the door, opened it. Henry Emmet-Tansley stood outside.

AS Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram went out, Emmet-Tansley slipped in before Woodring had a chance to close the door. He was still in evening clothes, although his white mess jacket was soiled and rumpled. His red hair was rumpled, too, and his eyes bloodshot. His plump face was lined with fatigue.

"Morning," he said. "You have a new bearer, I see."

"You seem tremendously interested in my servants," Woodring countered.

Emmet-Tansley's chubby hand made an evasive gesture. The manicured fingernails seemed the worse for wear.

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"I hope you'll pardon this intrusion again, old bean," he said, "but I simply had to see you, for two reasons: First, I wanted to apologize in case I said anything rude in my exhilarated mood of last evening. Second, I wanted to inquire if I happened to drop my wallet in your room."

"You did neither."

"Oh. Well, I must have dropped it some place along the line. Probably in some gilded den of iniquity in Karaiya Road. There were so many places. . . ." Emmet-Tansley passed his hand wearily across his eyes. Then he stared curiously at Woodring. "You're not looking too chipper," he resumed. "Been having a night out yourself?"

Woodring did not reply.

"At any rate, you look in a mood for a bracer. I've ordered some black velvet. Here it is now."

There was a faint knock at the door. Emmet-Tansley opened, reached out for a tray containing two glasses, a split of champagne and a bottle of stout. He kicked the door closed.

"Black velvet!" he apostrophized as he removed the foil from the neck of the champagne bottle. "Half stout, half champagne. Nothing like it when one is in my present dilemma. I can't tell whether I'm hung-over or still a bit jingled; consequently I don't know whether to pick myself up, or taper off. In either case, black velvet is a specific."

The cork popped. Emmet-Tansley filled the two glasses half full of the clear, golden champagne. Then added the stout. The resultant mixture was rich brown with a creamy foam.

"Take either glass," he said. There was a strange twinkle in his eyes as he added: "Neither's poisoned."

Woodring lifted one of the glasses, barely touched it to his lips.

"Cheer-o," said Emmet-Tansley, downing his drink at one draught.

Woodring drank, too. He liked the subtle, nutlike flavor, and he felt in great need of stimulant after the sleepless night's adventures.

"I suppose I look as if I'd slept in my clothes," said the garrulous redhead. "As a matter of fact, that's just what happened. I slept at the *thana.* Awfully decent chaps, these Calcutta police. I don't know where they found me, but they did their best to bring me home. Only I couldn't for the life of me remember what hotel I was stopping at. So they let me sleep it off in the police station."

"Nice of them, wasn't it?" said Woodring, putting down his glass.

"Awfully decent," Emmet-Tansley repeated. "But the awakening was a bit on the jumpy side. Fancy a man in my delicate condition come to life in the midst of bustling constables and detectives, all talking about a murder."

"Murder?"

"Yes," continued Emmet-Tansley, looking at Woodring narrowly over the rim of his glass. "Some European managed to get himself murdered last night. Chap by the name of Stiller."

"Basil Stiller?" The explosive exclamation escaped Woodring. He recovered himself instantly, but not, he saw, before Emmet-Tansley had noted his surprise.

"I say, old man, I didn't mean to startle you," said the redhead. "I hope he wasn't a friend of yours."

"He wasn't. But I knew him slightly."

"Pretty gruesome business, from what I overheard at the *thana,*" Emmet-Tansley went on. "They shot the poor chap in his own flat, then carted him away to some burning *ghat,* to put the torch to him. The police found

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him just in time. . . . Well, I must be buzzing off for a bath and a change. Cheer-o."

He started for the door, then came back.

"I say, I almost forgot something," he remarked. He took out a handkerchief and began polishing the outside of his glass. "It wouldn't do for my fingerprints to be discovered in case *you* were found murdered," he added solemnly. Then his mouth opened wide and his head went back with a prolonged peal of hearty laughter. When he stopped laughing, he said: "And I hope you didn't leave *your* fingerprints around promiscuously last night, Woodring."

"Thanks for the black velvet," said Woodring, opening the door.

HE locked it as soon as Emmet-Tansley left. Then he whipped out a cigarette, lighted it, puffed furiously for a moment, ground it out. He resumed undressing. He'd have time for a hurried bath, at least. It would help him think more clearly, and he needed all his mental powers this morning to cope with the rapid march of events. Things were certainly happening in quick succession.

So Stiller was murdered? Woodring thought he knew the motive. That damned envelope with the three green labels on the back, without a doubt. He was tempted to get in touch with Ruth Ingram and ask details, but decided against even using the telephone. There was no use calling attention to himself, and evidently the girl had not yet mentioned his name. If she had, the police would certainly have arrived by this time. And he could not become involved with the police here in Calcutta, when his business was patently in Darjeeling, now more than ever. Besides, it was likely that his fingerprints would be found in Stiller's flat.

Just how much did this Emmet-Tansley know, anyhow? He had obviously come this morning for the sole purpose of announcing Stiller's murder to Woodring, and watching the reaction. And what the dickens was Emmet-Tansley's connection with this business? Woodring strongly suspected that he was the one who had somehow got rid of Ram Das and tried to plant Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram as Woodring's bearer—and someone's stool pigeon. . . .

Well, the best thing to do now was to get out of the hotel and go into hiding until train time. Woodring hastily finished his toilet, threw a few things into a light bag, picked up his bedding roll, went downstairs. At the desk he paid his room rent a week in advance, and told the clerk he was leaving his other baggage because he was going to Barrackpore for the night. Then he hailed a taxi and had himself driven to Howrah station.

At the station he checked his bags and took another taxi for a few miles down the river to the botanical gardens at Sibpur. There were trees here and lawn, and the hot steamy air was fragrant with the earthy smell of growing things. There was shade, too, and he might stretch out for an hour or two of sleep. He had been awake all night and was exhausted, yet could think of no other place where he might doze without the danger of a rude awakening. No one would think of looking for him on a lawn at Sibpur. . . .

BY six o'clock in the evening he was back at Howrah, taking a bite to eat in the railway refreshment

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room. He retrieved his bags and took another taxi back across the river to Calcutta. He would get to Sealdah station just before the departure of the Darjeeling Mail—which was just as he planned.

He had not planned, however, for his taxi to drive off the Howrah Bridge smack into a traffic jam in Harrison Road—which is what happened. It was a traffic tangle such as could occur only on the principal native thoroughfare of a great Indian city. Vehicles of East and West, of the Twentieth Century and the Tenth, were locked in hopeless immobility. For ten minutes Woodring was an island of muttered profanity in a sea of crescent-horned buffaloes, hump-backed bullocks, *ticca gharis,* bicycles, vintage flivvers, and modern motors. At one side of him, a marooned taxi-*walla* was squawking the bulb of his horn with the dusty toes of his bare foot. At the other a fat *Bunya* dozed with eyes shut and chubby hands clasped across his stomach, while his gaudily uniformed chauffeur cursed in three dialects. In front a half-naked boy leaned forward from his two-wheeled cart to twist his buffalo's tail. From the littered pavements, spattered with betel-juice, scarlet-mouthed Bengalis and roving sacred cows watched the growing chaos with the same dull eyes of apathy.

Woodring looked at his watch. It was five minutes to eight, and the Darjeeling Mail left at 8:16. During the next ten minutes his taxi edged forward fifty yards. . . .

At the corner of Chitpur Road, a sudden break appeared in the barrier. The motor roared as Woodring's taxi shot through the narrow opening, reached the clear. At 8:15, squealing brakes halted him in front of Dealdah station.

Luggage coolies immediately swarmed about the taxi. Woodring flung a banknote to the driver. Before he could reach his bag and bedding roll, a black, lanky Tamil in an astrakhan cap came plunging through the crowd of coolies, took possession.

"Hurry, *sahib,*" urged Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram. "Mail train is just now leaving."

"Damn your hide! Drop those!" ordered Woodring. "I—"

"Have reconsidered *sahib's* negative offer," the Tamil shouted over his shoulder as he loped ahead toward the station. "Most undesirous that *pukka sahib* travel without servant."

Woodring pursued his luggage and the black youth through the arcades of the station. Apparently he was to have a bearer in spite of himself. Moreover there was no time for argument now. The rails gleamed under the glaring searchlight of the Chittagong Mail, thundering in from the east. From the next platform the shrill whistle of the station master signaled the daparture of the Darjeeling train. A chorus of goodbyes arose from many throats. The carriage windows were aflutter with wives waving to the hot-weather widowers on the platform.

Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram, five paces ahead of Woodring, flung open a door just as the train began to move. He jumped in, then reappeared as Woodring caught the bottom step.

"Luggage is inside compartment, *sahib,*" he announced. Will return to prepare bedding when train stops at Ranaghat Junction."

Woodring remained on the bottom step, watching the Tamil work his way to the rear, swing aboard the servants' section. Then he climbed into the train himself and stood in the doorway a moment to catch his breath. His tall,

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broad-shouldered figure was silhouetted by the lights behind him as the Darjeeling Mail clattered over a bridge, gained speed as it plunged through the Narkkooldanga slums.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORCHID HUNTER

AS the station master's whistle announced the imminent departure of the train, Inspector Prike stood at the entrance to his compartment, his keen photographic eyes recording details of the people before him. He stepped aside as the flushed, perspiring face of Deputy Inspector Robbins loomed through the crowd.

Robbins jumped in, dropped a leather briefcase on the seat.

"Hello, Robbins," said Prike. "Made it, I see."

The door closed. The train creaked into motion.

"By the skin of my eyeteeth, Inspector," Robbins panted.

"That's because you took the time to go home and kiss Mrs. Robbins goodbye," said Prike.

Robbins looked blank. "Am *I* shadowed, Inspector?" he asked.

Prike laughed quietly. "Even *you* could make that simple deduction, Robbins," he said. "The left spike of your mustache is slightly awry, and there's a smudge of lip rouge on your left cheek. So, knowing you to be a great family man . . . What have you got there?"

"The handwriting samples you asked for, Inspector. I've got Blenn, Miss Ingram, Stiller, Hubertson and Dr. Feurmann. The only thing I could get on Christopher Jericho is his signature on an old typewritten letter."

Robbins was unloading his briefcase. Prike took the papers, glanced at them casually. The locomotive shrieked, approaching the Dum-Dum Road crossing.

"That should be sufficient," said Prike, at last. "You couldn't get me a sample of Count Vaznilko's writing?"

"I've got a photostatic copy of the register at the Great Eastern," Robbins replied. His signature's on it. So is this chap Paul Woodring's."

"What makes you think I want Woodring's?"

"Because of this!" declared Robbins triumphantly. He laid a set of glossy photographs in Prike's lap. "Latent fingerprints," he announced, "developed by the nitrate process off that envelope we found on the floor of Stiller's flat. A perfect set."

"How do you know they're Woodring's?"

"Because we went to Woodring's room at the Great Eastern this afternoon, and took some more prints. They match. So it all ties up, Inspector. That *khansama* next door told me—"

"Yes, I know. The *khansama* next door saw a man answering Woodring's description enter Stiller's flat by the kitchen shortly after the bullock cart came for Stiller's body. Why would he return *afterward,* Robbins?"

"To make certain the body was gone," the deputy answered. "And tell me this: Why didn't Miss Ingram tell us about Woodring? And why did Woodring leave his hotel so suddenly this morning?"

"You might ask him," said Prike, with a faint smile. "He's traveling by this train."

"He's what?" The Deputy's waxed mustache bristled. "Then I'll—"

"Don't, Robbins. I'd rather let him think he's not being watched—at least for the present. Do you mind?"

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Robbins sat down. He shook his head dubiously.

"Anything else, Robbins?"

"That's about all, sir. I found one of Stiller's servants. Seems it's correct about Stiller giving his servants a holiday on account of his expecting to be away. The rest of 'em have gone off to their own villages, but I've arranged to have depositions taken."

"No trace of a man who might be Christopher Jericho?"

"Not a whisker of him, Inspector. At least not yet. And I haven't had any luck with tracing that camera lens number, either, but Jenkins will look after that."

"I suppose Jenkins *can* count," said Prike.

He began examining the contents of Robbins's briefcase. The papers stirred faintly in the tepid draft from a bracket fan. Robbins dropped the slatted shutter from one of the windows, but the sultry breeze from outside was no improvement. He mopped his dripping face. The Darjeeling Mail drove forward into the hot night.

FOR half an hour Inspector Prike frowned at the documentation Robbins had collected. For the next thirty minutes he sat smoking in silent meditation. His eyes were closed when the train slowed for the first stop at Ranaghat Junction.

The cars had scarcely come to a halt when a face appeared at the window. A voice called: "Inspector Prike!"

Robbins opened the door to admit Dr. Adolph Feurmann.

The German seemed in a state of great perturbation. His pale eyes blinked excitedly behind his thick glasses.

"Ach, Inspector," he blurted, "Didn't I told you he was dangerous? He is following me, Inspector!"

"You mean Count Vaznilko?"

"Yes. He is on this train."

"I know," said Prike quietly. "Third first class carriage, second compartment."

"So. Then you are here to protect me, Inspector?"

"I'm not going as far as Darjeeling, probably," Prike replied. "I have a little business in Santahar. Sit down, Dr. Feurmann, and smoke a cigarette with us. We stop here for ten minutes."

Prike extended a gold *koftgari* cigarette case—a little remembrance for having solved the double disappearance of two of the wives of a Punjabi rajah, years ago.

"Dr. Feurmann," he continued, holding out a match, "I've been wondering why it is you were carrying a candid camera on this expedition. After all, you don't have to maneuver to catch a tree or a plant in a pose that isn't self-conscious. I should think you'd be glad to get the better detail a larger camera affords."

"True, Inspector, true," agreed the German. "However, in the field weight and space are valuable. I come back loaded like a donkey with specimens. Dozens and dozens of orchids. Hundreds, even."

"Exquisite flower, the orchid," said Prike. "They've always fascinated me. I once knew a man who claimed to have a hundred orchids—Corallorhiza orchids, I believe he called them—growing on the branches of a single live-oak tree. Is that possible, Doctor?"

"Indeed, yes," Feurmann replied. "The orchid grows in trees. It is a parasite."

"You know, Doctor," Prike continued, "you really should try to go

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into Shimalghar while you're in Darjeeling. I understand there are nearly seven hundred varieties of orchid growing in the rain-forests of that state."

"Indeed yes," said the German. "I was in fact planning a little expedition into Shimalghar. Its orchids are indeed famous."

"One of the most curious orchids I ever saw came from Shimalghar," said Prike, blowing a thoughtful smoke ring. "It was yellow, with delightful purple markings. *Epidendrum Stamfordianum,* I believe it was called. You should try and get a specimen."

"What a coincidence!" exclaimed Dr. Feurmann happily. That you should mention the very orchid I am most interested in. It is one I want most to bring back to Switzerland. It is one reason, indeed, why I will go to Shimalghar. For the *Epidendrum Stamfordianum."*

Prike removed his cigarette from between his lips, stared at Dr. Feurmann for a moment. Then:

"I'm afraid you won't find any," he said regretfully.

"Ach, no?"

"No," said Prike. "I recall now that the *Epidendrum Stamfordianum* is native to Guatemala, not Shimalghar. How stupid of me! But then of course I don't pretend to be a botanist."

The station master's whistle sounded outside.

THE inspector held out his hand. "Good night, Dr. Feurmann," he said. "And don't let this Count Vaznilko spoil your sleep tonight. My good friend Robbins will keep an eye on him for you. *Schlafen Sie wohl."*

"Auf Wiedersehen, und gute Nacht, Herr Inspektor!" Dr. Feurmann bowed stiffly from the waist.

Prike stood in the doorway, watching his departing visitor walk briskly down the station platform. A passing guard slammed the door. The train began to move again.

"Robbins," said Prike with the broadest grin his subordinate had seen in months, "what would you think of a botanist who doesn't know that the Corallorhiza orchid is not a parasite, growing on live trees, but a saprophyte which lives only on decayed wood?"

"The man's a ruddy fraud!" said Robbins. "He's no more botanist than my left tibia."

"Exactly," said Prike. "Furthermore, he's not a refugee from Nazi Germany."

"He's a German, all right," said Robbins. "I saw his passport."

"You saw his passport. But you didn't notice the date?"

"I did. It was issued in January of this year."

"Then you should know, Robbins, that the *Herr Doktor* is not the enemy of the Nazis that he would have us believe. The Nazi Government does not issue passports to its enemies to go abroad and spread 'vile untruths' about the Third Reich. There are concentration camps in Germany for just such persons. We may assume, therefore, that Dr. Feurmann is in India with the full knowledge and aquiescence of authorities in Berlin."

'What does that mean, Inspector?" Robbins demanded.

Prike shrugged.

"Perhaps nothing," he said, sitting down. "Pass me that specimen of Feurmann's handwriting, like a good fellow, Robbins. And the original of the Jericho telegram, too."

The Inspector frowned as he compared the two sheets of papers. The

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click-clack of the rails rose to a roar as the Darjeeling Mail passed a Calcutta-bound passenger train. A dizzy serpentine of lighted windows flashed by.

CHAPTER IX

DARK EYES

AS the train rumbled over the first bridge. Paul Woodring backed into the compartment and fastened the door. He turned around, began taking off his khaki jacket. With one arm still in his sleeve he stopped and stared. On the seat opposite the one on which his luggage lay, was a woman.

"There seems to be some mistake," she said.

"I wonder," said Woodring. He sat down, coolly detailing his unexpected traveling companion. She was a tall, well-made woman of about thirty. Her thin dress of figured cerise foulard did little to conceal the contours of her body, which were generous and provocative. Her dark glossy hair, blue-black in its shadows, was parted severely in the center, yet it failed to lend severity to the worldly oval face dominated by full, ripe lips. Neither did her long, curling black lashes make her gaze demure. The expression of her eyes was untroubled, bold, even hostile. Or was it hostility that Woodring saw there? It was a strange, disturbing light that came and went, something enigmatic and knowing, something out of tragic antiquity, something, perhaps, of Asia.

Asia! That might be the explanation. Instinctively Woodring glanced at her long, olive-tinted hands, looking for the telltale crescents on the fingernails. Apparently she was without a touch of the tar-brush, although Woodring thought he had detected a faint trace of *chicki* accent in her speech, the relic of a childhood spent with native servants. Country-born, perhaps, although she didn't look it. Not that Woodring shared the popular disdain for that strange world apart, that half-world which manned the railways and the telegraphs, clerked for ridiculous salaries, and danced at the Xavier Club on Saturday nights. Furthermore, Woodring didn't see why it should matter to him what she was—except that there was something vaguely familiar about the woman, something he could not quite remember.

"You really might ask permission to share my compartment," she was saying. Her voice was low-pitched, warmly exciting.

"I'm not so sure," Woodring replied, "that this isn't my compartment."

"I am. I reserved it. I made my bookings this morning," she said.

Suddenly Woodring knew where he had seen the woman before, and the realization gave him a feeling of cold at the pit of his stomach.

"Yes, I know you did," he said slowly. "You made your booking immediately after I made mine. You were sitting in a *ghari* in Koilaghat Street this morning when I went in to the E.B.R. offices. You were still there when I came out."

"Really? I didn't notice you. I suppose I should feel flattered that you noticed me . . although I doubt very much if you did."

"I did, Miss Carmaine."

"Oh." That same disturbing light glowed again in the dark eyes. "You know my name. What else do you know about me?"

"Nothing," said Woodring. "I merely noticed that your luggage is labeled 'Leda Carmaine.' I guessed at

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the 'Miss' because you're not wearing a wedding ring."

"I see," Leda Carmaine laughed. "So you think the clerk put us into the same compartment by mistake?"

"No," said Woodring curtly.

"Then I don't understand."

"I think you found out what compartment I'd booked this morning," Woodring explained, "and then either deliberately booked the other seat in the name of some imaginary male—or merely noted the number and settled yourself in it without booking."

LEDA CARMAINE did not reply at once. She took a cigarette from her mesh handbag, a tiny cigarette scarcely larger than the match with which she lighted it. As the flame touched its tip, Woodring was aware of the strong fragrance of ambrein.

"Your colossal conceit," said Leda Carmaine in a smooth tone that was not in the least indignant, "is exceeded only by your impertinence."

"Thank you," said Woodring.

"Very likely your great masculine charm is such that you are accustomed to having strange women pursue you?"

"Not very often, I'm sorry to say," Woodring replied.

"But you do think I am here by design?"

"Yes."

"What do you propose to do about it?"

"Nothing, for the moment," said Woodring. "In view of the peculiar construction of the Eastern Bengal Railway's compartment trains, we seem condemned to endure each other's company until the next station, which is, I believe, Ranaghat. We're due there at nine-thirty."

"And after Ranaghat, what?"

"If I were a gallant young man," said Woodring, "at Ranaghat I should leave you in full possession of this compartment and hunt up another place to sleep."

"And are you a gallant young man?"

"Not very. I'm conceited and impertinent."

"So you propose to spend the night in my compartment?" Leda Carmaine's voice was completely devoid of alarm. The question was languid, only mildly curious.

"*My* compartment," Woodring insisted.

"But I booked—"

"Yes, so you said. Shall we take the matter up with one of the guards at the next station?"

"As you like." Leda stifled a yawn. She leaned over to lower the window shutter. The train was rushing through paddy fields aglitter with a greenish firmament of fireflies. She lazily flicked her cigarette stub into the night, rested her smooth, bare forearm on the window sill, and reclined in an attitude of voluptuous boredom. She crossed her legs.

They were pretty legs, Woodring remarked. Nor could he help remarking that Leda Carmaine was perfectly aware of the fact that they were pretty legs. The sheerest of flesh-colored silk encased the shapely calves, and the hem of the gown seemed draped with careful carelessness to set off the display to best advantage. The advantage was such that Woodring could not help glimpsing a flash of cerise garter above one knee.

Simultaneously and with a rude start, he saw the unmistakable gleam of steel.

He turned his head, dropped the window shutter nearest him, looked out of the window with the same af-

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fected nonchalance that Leda Carmaine was showing. He could not know if he was supposed to see what was tucked under the cerise garter, but he had. And he was more convinced than ever that Leda Carmaine was one of Alexander Blenn's "certain parties." He wondered if Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram had been guilty of complicity in putting him in the same compartment as this dark-eyed woman. Possibly not. Leda Carmaine had been sitting in the near corner of the compartment, with the shutter drawn, so that the Tamil bearer might possibly have tossed in the luggage without seeing her. And yet the black youth was far from being a fool . . .

Or perhaps Leda was an accomplice of that amiable and ubiquitous drunk, Emmet-Tansley. Perhaps she was on her own. Perhaps— But he would certainly find out soon enough. He lit a cigarette and glanced at Leda over the flaming match. She was still looking out the window, but he knew she was watching him out of the corner of her eye.

Neither spoke. Both pretended to be absorbed in the shadowy Bengal landscape speeding by in the warm darkness. And each was aware that the other was watching.

AT 9:30 the Darjeeling Mail sighed to a stop at Ranaghat. An instant later the compartment door opened and Georges Clemenceau Malaswaram loped in. Without further ado he began unfastening the straps of Woodring's bedding roll. Leda Carmaine watched him listlessly.

"Shall prepare *sahib's* bed this side?" he asked.

Woodring looked at Leda. She shrugged.

"Yes," said Woodring.

As the Tamil set to work, Leda's bearer limped into the compartment. He was a twisted, misshapen little Moslem with a black goat beard. While the Tamil was smoothing out Woodring's sheets of unbleached muslin, and making short work of a pneumatic pillow and a light wool blanket, Woodring saw that the other bearer was busy too. From Leda Carmaine's bedding roll came hemstitched linen sheets, dainty lace-bordered pillows, a light silk comforter. The scent of musk filled the compartment as the crippled Moslem tucked in the linen sheets.

Without a word, Woodring stepped from the train, quickly crossed the platform, entered the refreshment room. The dimly lighted interior was suffocating, despite a feebly whirling punkah. He walked to a table in the shadowy far corner, where he could still watch the platform and the side of the train.

"Burra peg lao," he ordered as a *khansama* approached.

The servant had just brought the double whisky-soda when Woodring saw Ruth Ingram come into the refreshment room. He doubted his eyes at first, but when she hesitated a moment beneath the punkah, her curly brown hair alive in the faint stir of warm air, he recognized her trim young figure, the poise of her small head, the troubled expression in her wondering blue eyes. Evidently she was a passenger on the Darjeeling Mail. Why? . . . He looked the other way, but she immediately walked toward his table.

He looked at her blankly

"Don't talk to me in here," Woodring murmured into his drink as he lifted his glass.

"But I must talk to you!"

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"Then I'll come to your compartment if you're alone."

"I'm alone. I bought enough tickets to reserve the whole compartment. Third first class carriage, fourth compartment."

"Good. I'll come when I can. Next station, perhaps. Now don't stand here any longer."

The girl moved away, bought a package of cigarettes, and went out. Woodring finished his drink, paid for it, and sauntered out to the platform. The Mail would not leave for another three or four minutes.

Woodring lost himself behind a crowd of Hindus clustered about a water vender. From where he stood he could look into his own compartment. It appeared deserted except for Leda Carmaine's deformed Moslem bearer.

Woodring scanned the length of the train from the panting locomotive to the guard's van. After a moment he caught sight of Leda. She was standing on the platform, apparently taking a breath of air and smoking one of her tiny perfumed cigarettes. But despite her air of casual idling, Woodring saw that she was listening to a man who was leaning from a car window just behind her. He could not hear the man's voice above the din and bustle of the station platform, but he saw his lips moving. The man had a rather distinguished-looking face—or rather a face that had once been distinguished. It reminded Woodring of the ruin of some old castle that still retained a vestige of stateliness despite its dilapidation. And yet the face was not old; it was dissipated, rather. There were pouches under the eyes and the lips moved loosely as they formed words. His hair, slicked back straight from the forehead, was dark except for one silvery white strand on the left side.

A whistle sounded and a guard ran along the side of the train, closing doors. Woodring saw Leda Carmaine walk rapidly back to her compartment. She stood at a window, looking anxiously up and down the platform, as the train began to move from the station.

Looking for him, he guessed. Afraid that he had given her the slip. His eyes narrowed.

Woodring counted the first-class carriages as they slowly passed: One . . . two . . third carriage, fourth compartment He sprinted, caught the step. The slatted shutters were closed, but there was a light inside. He hung on with one hand, rapped with the other. There was no response. The rumbling wheels of the Mail clicked over switch frogs. Woodring knocked again. The train was gaining speed.

At last the door swung open. Woodring jumped in.

CHAPTER X

TÊTE À TÊTE

RUTH INGRAM helped Woodring pull the door closed.

"Then this *is* your compartment," Woodring said. "I thought I was in for another surprise when you didn't open for me."

"I wasn't expecting you. You said the *next* station."

"I know. I changed my mind." Woodring sat down. He noticed that the bed was made up on the opposite side of the compartment. "Now. Why do you have to talk to me?"

"Because I had to tell you that the police know about you," the girl replied. "You were worried about that this morning, so I thought I should warn you."

"What did you tell them?"

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"Nothing. Inspector Prike—that's the C.I.D. investigator—opened a telegram from Uncle Alex this morning that mentioned your name. Uncle wanted me to give you any telegrams that came for him."

"So Mr. Blenn is expecting more messages like the one that gave him the jitters last night," Woodring said. "Were there any?"

"No."

"Then why are you on this train? Just to warn me?"

"No. I thought I might be of some help to Uncle Alex. Obviously he's in some sort of serious trouble. His telegram came from Santahar."

"I see. So Inspector Prike is probably on the train too?"

"Yes. He seems to be interested in this Christopher Jericho you mentioned." Ruth repeated what little she had gleaned during Prike's investigation that morning.

"I wish you'd be frank with me," Woodring said.

Her eyes met his, questioningly. "I am being," she said. "At least—" She broke off abruptly, helplessly. "Please don't—"

"Never mind," he told her, a little angrily.

Woodring got up to adjust the fan, which was making a tinny clatter. He said: "I thought you'd stay in Calcutta for Stiller's funeral."

"There's no funeral," the girl said. "Basil didn't believe in anything, so any sort of ceremony would be both silly and sacriligious.. They're going to cremate him when the police release the body."

"You're not even in mourning," said Woodring, eyeing the girl's suit of ecru linen.

"You don't expect me to wear black in this weather, I hope," was Ruth's comment. "And I'm certainly not going to wear a crêpe arm band like a Eurasian stenographer."

"No, of course not. But I almost wish your heart was in mourning for him—just a little."

"You wish that?"

"Yes. I'm disappointed in the idea that you were marrying Stiller for convenience. Oh, I know you're afraid of your uncle and probably dependent on him, too, but my first impression of you was that you had something of the Blenn . . . well, guts, if you'll pardon my being vulgar. I thought you were the sort of person to stand up to Blenn, to shape your own life, rather than let it be twisted to fit a marriage to a man like Stiller."

"I'm not sure I would have married Basil," the girl said.

"Then why did you let him think so?"

His eyes searched her face.

"Well, I sincerely intended to marry him. It wasn't that I was completely dominated by Uncle Alex, either. He'd have taken care of me, even if I had revolted. I wouldn't have been his sole heir, but he promised me a thousand pounds a year, no matter what happened. And yet—perhaps it was something of the Blenn family strain—I did want to be his sole heir. I wanted awfully to be rich and powerful, and to dominate people. I'd have dominated Basil Stiller, too. I rather liked the idea."

"But you didn't love Stiller."

"You seem a lot surer of that than I was."

"You couldn't have loved him."

"No. But I thought that in time I'd get used to the idea of being married to him. Because while I didn't love Basil, I wasn't in love with anybody else—then."

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"And now?"

"Now I'm pretty sure I couldn't have married Basil," said the girl, taking out a vanity case.

"Why not?" Woodring demanded.

THE girl did not reply. In silence she dabbed powder on her pert nose. The lights of a country station flashed through the closed shutters. Ruth replaced her minuscule powder puff, extended her hand.

"Couldn't I borrow a cigarette?" she asked.

Woodring obliged. He struck a match.

"That envelope you found in Basil's flat this morning," Ruth resumed. "The one with the green seals on the back—wasn't it to get the contents of that envelope that Basil was killed?"

"Probably," Woodring answered.

A shadow darkened Ruth's blue eyes. "Then in order to carry out your task in Darjeeling, you'll be forced to find the murderer of Basil Stiller?" she asked.

"Not necessarily," said Woodring. "I fully expect to meet the gentleman—or latly—but I'm certainly not looking for him—or her."

"But if the murderer has the documents—?"

"He hasn't," Woodring chuckled. "When Stiller was murdered, that envelope probably contained exactly what it contained when he stole it from me. Three folded pages of yesterday's edition of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika.*"

Ruth Ingram's dimples appeared. There was admiration in her smile. Then her eyes clouded again.

"You mean you're carrying the original documents with you—on your person?" she asked.

The car began to sway and jolt, and the clatter it made filled the small compartment. It was not, Woodring thought, the most desirable place in the world to hold a *tête à tête,* except that the rattling commotion gave them a reasonable assurance that what they were saying could not be overheard.

"I decline to be quoted," said Woodring.

"You could tell me, couldn't you?"

"I could. But I think it's best for all concerned that I didn't."

"All right. Be mysterious. Where's your compartment?"

"Two cars back," said Woodring. "But I don't think I'll return to it. A young lady has made up her mind to sleep there."

"Oh." The dimple reappeared. "So you're protecting your virtue?"

"Virtue," said Woodring, "is not one of my shortcomings. I simply don't care for the lady's company."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Leda Carmaine. Know her?"

"No. What did she do to incur your dislike?"

"Nothing," said Woodring. "But I'm never apt to be very friendly with a lady who carries a steel dagger tucked under her garter."

"Garter? Well! That sounds friendly enough," Ruth said.

"I'm not sure I was supposed to see the dagger. I rather think not. I think Miss Carmaine overplayed her hand. Or her leg, to be more accurate."

THE girl did not join in Woodring's laughter. Her face was grave as she suggested: "Why don't you stay in here, then?"

Woodring shook his head. "Might compromise you," he said.

"You might try," the girl countered. "But I warn you it would be a waste of time."

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"I could get my bearer for a chaperon at the next station," said Woodring. "But I'd rather not. I don't trust him."

"Then why did you hire him?"

"I didn't. That's why I don't trust him. He simply attached himself to me under protest. I haven't been able to give him the sack."

"I don't insist on a chaperon," Ruth said. "I didn't hire you either, but I think I trust you."

"You'll have to, as far as Poradaha. And I may ask your indulgence until we reach Ishurdi. We're due there around midnight."

"All right. I can promise you I'm carrying no concealed weapons," Ruth smiled. "But you'll have to take my word for it."

The Mail made only a short stop at Poradaha. Woodring and the girl sat behind closed shutters, listening to the station sounds. There was apparently not much activity on the platform. What little noise there was, soon subsided into thick hot silence. Then came the station master's whistle. Immediately afterward Woodring heard the sound of someone fumbling with the catch on the compartment door. Ruth heard it, too, for she gave him an inquiring glance.

"It's the guard trying the doors," Ruth said.

"No, it's not. The guard passed a minute ago."

Ruth Ingram lowered one of the shutters a crack, peered out. Her expression changed. Woodring heard something heavy thud against the door.

"There's a man—!" the girl's speech was frantic. "He must be hurt! He's fallen against the car! The train's moving! He'll be killed under the wheels!"

Woodring sprang to the door, opened it. A man fell in, sprawled on the floor. Woodring pulled the man's legs inside the compartment, slammed the door.

The man lay as he had fallen, face downward. His white topi was jammed so tightly on his head that it had not come off, although the front of the brim was crushed by the impact.

The car lurched as the Darjeeling Mail picked up speed.

Woodring bent over the prostrate figure, seized the shoulders, turned the man on his back. He straightened up suddenly, his tanned face creased by bewilderment.

The man on the floor was Emmet-Tansley.

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Screwball

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Spin Down, Spin In," etc.

WHEN the Old Man called me into his private doghouse, which is the open corner of the city room where he crouches at a battered desk and hands out the daily assignments to the scribes of the New York *Chronicle*, I didn't expect to get a free trip south. I expected to get roasted a luscious brown for having faked an interview with a visiting poetess.

But we live and learn.

"Pat," the Old Man said, "do you like baseball?"

I said: "I'm nuts about baseball, chief."

"Sure, sure," he said. "But do you *know* anything about the game?"

"Know anything?"—I fixed him with a dirty look. "Maybe I never told you, chief, but my father was Three-Fingered Allen in the Tinker to Evers to Chance days. I was fed infield flies for breakfast, pitch-outs for dinner, and double steals for supper until I was knee-high to a batting cage. I know more about baseball than you and Abner Doubleday combined."

"Huh," the Old Man said, disagreeing slightly with that last crack. "Are you just giving me double-talk or are you on the level?"

I said, "I'm on the level, chief. Why, I still know most of the old-timers. Ask Ty Cobb about my dad and about me. Or Tris Speaker—"

"Did you ever," the Old Man asked, still regarding me with frankly open suspicion, "know Hughie Marranton when he was playing with the Braves?"

"Of course I did," I told him. "Hughie Marranton played alongside Dad for two

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seasons in Baltimore. He was the best first-sacker in the league before he turned in his glove and took up managering the Green Sox. Why, he's in training camp right now, down in St. Pete—"

"Okay," said the Old Man. "That sells me. I've already sent Jimmy Lane to cover the Green Sox training camp for this office, but he says he needs another scribe to help him out. You're hired, Pat. Pack a bag and grab the Orange Blossom Special tonight. I'll have a guy at the station with your ticket and some cash. You're to stay with the Green Sox and follow them north. I want a story every day. Any further instructions will be wired. You got that?"

"Got it?" I exclaimed. "Gadzooks, chief, I'll never forget it! Is this all on the level? You mean I'm really going south?"

"Wait a second, Pat," the Old Man said suddenly. "I almost forgot to tell you. I want you to cover a certain angle."

"Angle?" I said, smelling a rat. "What kind of angle?"

"Well," he said, "Jimmy Lane will handle the regulation stuff—the games and the box scores and the training. So you've got to hit another slant." He coughed. "I'll tell you how all this came about. Wilston Kenyon's wife is a baseball fan. And she told Kenyon—who happens to publish this newspaper, lest you forget—that she thought the sports reporters seldom covered baseball from any sort of a woman's viewpoint. The color, the glamor, the personalities. She wanted the *Chronicle* to send down some one who would do that—" he smirked at me—"and you, Allen old thing, are elected."

I goggled at him. "Aw, chief—" I said. "I can't do that. It's mutiny—it's skullduggery—"

He read dryly from the pale green page of Kenyon's memorandum: "Last year's attendance records show an increase of twenty-one percent in feminine interest in the Green Sox. The average Ladies' Day draw was 1,800 ahead of 1935. In view of the *Chronicle's* policy to pioneer in news-gathering—"

He slammed the memorandum down. "It's orders from the Lord High, Pat," he said. "Yours not to question why. So scram, kid, and no more lip out of you."

He gave me his gargoyle grin and the jut of his Simon Legree jaw. He was laughing when I staggered away from there, and for all I know he was still laughing, a day and a half later, when I chugged into St. Pete aboard the Orange Blossom Special.

BASEBALL gets into your system, I guess. If I needed a pick-me-up, I got same that afternoon when I made up my first visit to the Green Sox camp to give my all for the she-fans of the Bronx and Broadway.

It was a scene to stir your heart and set your blood to tingling. The warm Floridian sun lighting the lush green grass of Mitchell Park. The resonant crack of seasoned ash meeting horsehide. The solid *chunk* of the ball plopping into the socket of a catcher's mitt. The voices of the players rising up with strange clarity against the hollowness of the empty grandstands. The brown dirt of the skinned infield pock-marked with cleat tracks. And out in the pitcher's box, a lanky lad bracing himself against the rubber and smoking the ball across.

"Gadzooks," I breathed, "this is heaven!"

Jimmy Lane had met me at the train. At lunch time, at the hotel, he introduced me around—rather apologetically, too, the louse. I suppose he resented the fact that I was a symphony in summer blue and white while he looked like a ragman's stepson in slacks and a soiled sweater. We taxied to the training field together, and James departed to seek out his own sources of he-man information. I hit the trail of glamor by hunting the person of Hugh Marranton. I found him in the dugout below the grandstand.

Old Hughie frowned when he saw me coming. He started to say: "Who in hell—" and then he stopped. He took a good stary look, then yipped like a Sioux and came war-dancing out on the grass.

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"Pat Allen!" He bellowed. "Glory be to the snakes of St. Patrick! How the devil —why the devil—where the devil have you been?"

"Glory be to the wife of the publisher of the New York *Chronicle*," I said. "She's the Jezebel who condemned me to this chain-gang. . . . How are you, Hugh, you old buzzard?"

We carried on like that for quite a while. We sat in the dugout and talked about the good old days when Hugh and my dad were setting the old league on fire. Finally Hugh said, "What are you doing down here, Pat?"

"Covering the Green Sox," I said with a wry face, "from a woman's angle."

Hugh peered to see if I was serious and then burst out laughing. "That's good!" he said between guffaws. "That's great! Pat Allen covering fashions in baseball! Pat Allen, whose old man chawed the biggest hunk of eating-tobacco in the game!"

"I didn't ask for it," I said. "It was handed to me. And when you're making your bread and butter in the Fourth Estate, you say yowzuh and you cover your stint. How's the gang this year, Hugh? Are you going to cop the pennant again?"

"In the bag," Hugh said, trying to make his leathery old face look nonchalant. But his eyes were troubled and evasive.

"Look, oldtimer," I said, "you can't pull the wool over these optics. I've seen the elephant and heard the owl. What's the catch?"

"If there was one I wouldn't tell a newspaper," Hugh said dryly.

"Consider me just the progeny of Three Fingered Allen then."

"If you put it that way. . . ." A row of lines crossed Hugh's forehead. "I can't say what it really is, Pat. Times have changed so much. You take this team. They're tops —as fine a bunch of ball hounds as you'll find. But they ain't clicking."

"Why not?"

He shrugged. "Have you read the papers? Some college team from Orlando took us over last week. We've dropped three in a row to our own AA farmhands. The boys are sloppy. They try to hog the plays and get to be big-shots so that they can hold out for more dinero next season. They're jealous of each other's ability and salary. It don't make for teamwork, Pat. There's money in their minds first—baseball second."

"Hmmm," I said.

"Then they fight. They toss words in the lockers and on the field. The batting is so-so, pitching fair, fielding downright lousy. . . ." He sighed and looked at me. "You know what that means? You know what it means when a team doesn't pull together?"

"No pennant," I said. "No world series."

Hughie shook his gray head. "And me with six years to go on my Social Security payments."

WE sat there for a few seconds in a gloomy silence. Out on the diamond the infield was drilling and the gardeners were shagging flies. Gus Frederick, the Green Sox catcher, was starting a hot verbal battle with Joe Dilling, the first baseman, about a cut-off play that went sour. Mike Grady, from his shortstop post, was chiming in with a couple of choice remarks about Frederick's catching, insinuating in pungent words that the backstopping was no better than Dilling's throw.

Hughie sighed. "There they go again. Five minutes and the outfield will be in on it. Just listen to that."

I listened, though there was no grist here for my woman's-angle mill. Bits of that repartee would have shocked Ernest Hemingway. I said: "A couple of those words are strangers even to me."

Hugh nodded. "I'm living and learning myself." He got up and out of the dugout and began to bellow. You could have heard him in the next county:

"Listen, you imitation bunch of croquet experts! Cut out the beefing and get back to work! This is a training camp, not a pink tea. . . . If you want to barber, join a debating club! If you want to fight, join the marines! But if you're going to stay on this team—*play ball!*"

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The hot words stopped and the infield sullenly went back to work. The drill was dispirited and sloppey. I was watching it and doing a lot of wondering. Hugh Marranton came back and sat down, breathing heavily. It was at this choice moment that the Voice descended upon us: "Is theah a man by th' handle of Mister Marranton 'round heahbouts, seh?"

The Voice, polite though it was, had an accent you couldn't have cut with a Damascus blade, as the swordsman used to say, and there was R.F.D. in every oozing word. I could smell the farm and the hay ricks. I had visions of plows and barns and wheat waving in the field.

We looked up. The owner of the Voice smiled down upon us. He had nice teeth, but that was all. Yet, as I ogled him, I saw that he was just homely enough to be charming, if inclined that way. His face was very long and sun-bronzed. It looked gaunt and yet it looked naively friendly. But the bozo was all out of proportion. His arms hung down to his knees and that was length, my friends, because he must have been six feet-four in his cotton socks. When I looked at him, I thought of Abraham Lincoln, except that this version was shuffling back and forth like an embarrassed kid.

Hugh Marranton winked at me. "Get a load of this, Pat." He leaned out of the dugout and called up: "Here, boy. I'm Hugh Marranton."

The gangling guy's eyes nearly popped out of his head and he leaned over to look down at Hugh and me, neither of us being more than five and a half feet tall. "Yo' *are*, seh?" the hick said. "Yo' really are the great Mister Marranton—manager of th' Green Sox?"

Hugh looked at me. "We've got a case here," he said in a low voice, and then: "In the flesh, General Lee. What do you want?"

"Wall, Mister Marranton," said the hick, "mah handle's Lemuel Bickel, seh. But the boys call me mostly Lem. Howdy."

"All right, Lem," Hugh said, smiling. "This here is Pat Allen, the best damn reporter in the business, bar none." Which was very extravagant of Hugh, him never having read a word of mine in print. "Now what's on your mind?"

Lemuel Bickel smiled thinly as though he were going to tell you the truth though you might not quite believe it. "Wall," he said slowly, "I reckoned I'd jine up with yo' team, seh. I come all the way from Paraminton, Arkansaw, jest t' do it."

"Well, well," Hugh said with a straight face. "That was very kindly of you."

"Yayah," Lem Bickel nodded. "I waited nigh onto two years t' pick th' team to jine. When yo'-all won the pennant three times runnin', I reckoned I'd sigh on with the Green Sox."

"Now look, son," Hugh said. "I'm awful sorry, but I don't just need a ball player right now. We're full up, understand? But you just follow the want ads and when we need a man, we'll advertise."

The kid didn't know he was being taken for a ride. He looked very surprised. "Yo' mean t' say you ain't goin' t' take me on?" he said. "Yo' won't find a ball player like me any day, Mister Marranton. Why, I was voted th most valuable player in the Arkansaw Amateur League for two years runnin'!"

Hugh stared hard at Bickel and saw from the honest glow in the hick's eyes that it wasn't a rib. He turned to me: "We've got a 19-karat screwball here, and I don't mean the kind that Hubbell throws, either."

"More on the Dizzy Dean side," I said.

"Yeah," said Hugh. "Except with Dizzy, it's an act. Take him out of my hair, will you?"

So I grabbed the conversation by the slack of the pants. "Look, Lem," I said, "how did you get to Florida?"

"Bus," Lem Bickel said, frowning. "Ain't they th' most expensive things though? Nigh to busted me flat."

"Have you any money now?"

"Shore," he said. "Eight bits."

I looked at Hugh, who shook his head sadly.

"But Mr. Marranton can't use you," I

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said. "How are you going to get back home?"

"Can't use me?" Lem Bickel exclaimed, looking panicky. "But he's *got* to use me! Ain't a question of me gettin' back home—I kin hitchhike theah. But Mister Marranton is got t' think of his team! Why, down home they used t' make me bunt all th' time on account I broke so many bats hittin' homers! And pitch—why, man, when I pitch a ball I throw it so doggone fast I can't hardly see it mahself!" He paused. "Besides," he added bashfully, "I'd kinda like to see New York. They say it's a big place. . . ."

Hugh began to grin. I was smiling myself. "Okay," Hugh said suddenly. "We'll try you out, Lem."

IT was time for the fielding drill to wind up anyway, I gathered. Hughie gave a blast on his tin whistle and the pepper games came to a halt. The regulars began to straggle in as the batting cage was wheeled into position. Lemuel Bickel, of Paraminton, Ark., peeled off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, accepted a pair of spiked shoes from a grinning clubhouse boy. Some of the players gathered curiously around.

"This is Lem Bickel, boys," Hugh Marranton said dryly. "He's going to show us the latest brand of fancy pitching."

The rookie scuffed a toe modestly. "Shucks, Mister Marranton, I didn't aim to go braggin'—"

"That's *all* right," Hugh said, tipping off the boys with a wink. "If a man can outhit Ruth and outpitch Hubbell, you can't blame him for admitting it, can you, boys?"

Dilling, the first-sacker, chimed in promptly: "I should say not! We need a man like Elmer—"

"Lemuel," Bickel interrupted. "But yo' jest call me Lem."

"Sure," grinned Dilling. "We certainly need a man like Lem!"

"I'll say!" said Frederick, the catcher. I haven't had a real high hard one to catch since the Federal League blew up."

Zinco, the center-fielder, a ponderous guy who figured himself a wag, put in his penny's worth. "Say, Lem, maybe you could give me some practise catching flies out near the fence. Can't none of these boys reach it. I'm afraid I'll go stale."

"Anythin' you fellers say," Lem Bickel replied modestly. "I only aim t' help th' team, thet's me!"

"All right," Hugh said. "You go out there and limber up, Lem." He turned to Zinco, his clean-up man. "You try to hit this wizard, Pete, as soon as he's ready."

"I'll sure try," Zinco said soberly, hiding his grin.

A conglomeration of battery men lined up on the diamond. Mr. Lemuel Bickel went to the mound and lobbed a few at Gus Frederick. The others gathered near the batting cage.

"This is dirty work," I said to Hugh Marranton. "Why the rib? The kid is taking this in deadly earnest. It'll break his heart."

"Just a screwball idea, Pat," Hugh said softly. "For a solid month I've been riding the tails of these lugs of mine. Six hours a day I'm telling them how hammy they are. I've been watching them fight each other and yell at each other until I thought I'd go nuts. So why shouldn't I grab a little chuckle when it comes along? We all can use a laugh."

"Sure," I said. "You deserve a laugh. But what about the kid?"

He gave out a grunt. "You're going soft, Pat. . . . Look—he's going to cut loose. Great Scott—get a load of that windup!"

And indeed the contortion was wond'rous to see. Frederick was receiving, Zinco was poised at the plate. Lem Bickel, toeing the rubber, looked taller than the Chrysler Building out there on the mound. He moved his right arm in a series of convoluted arcs. He reared back slowly on his right foot until his left toe pointed at a fleecy cloud that floated in the Florida sky. A statue of suspended animation. Finally he unwound and his foot descended. His arm swung through—

Pete Zinco did a Nijinski prance and hurled his bat away. He raised a yell unto

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the skies, hobbling in a semi-circle with the seat of his pants gripped firmly with both hands.

The laughter was spontaneous. We had to roar. Frederick sat down in the batter's box and rolled in the dust. Hughie Marranton gave out a guffaw that made the dugout echo, and I had my own little giggle. After it was all over, Lem Bickel kept apologizing. He was sorry, he said, but Zinco looked just like the home plate to him. That crack convulsed the gang again.

They finally quieted. Frederick tossed Lem the ball and there was another pitch. This one was good. It was a smoke ball, so fast I couldn't even follow it. Hugh grunted. Frederick and Zinco ducked. The ball went over their heads and hit the foul net behind them. It was a good fast ball, but it just didn't happen to be within four feet of the plate.

Zinco finally gasped: "Are you trying to bean me?"

"Honest," Lem Bickel said, "it was jest a slip. I couldn't see the plate so well."

He pitched a third one. It was still wide but Zinco caught it where he wanted it and slapped the pellet against the right field stands. A triple in any man's league.

"Oh, Lord," Hugh Marranton gasped, laughing, "He's terrible."

After a while they let Lem Bickel take a bat, and Reg Lamont slogged a few across. Lamont had a nasty curve and he took particular delight using it on Lem who would bounce away from the plate every time he saw it coming. It got so he was bouncing even when a floater sailed over. And the Green Sox just about perished from mirth. But the hick snapped them out of it when he smacked one lustily and then stood by the home plate while the ball sailed out over the center field wall, completely out of the park.

"Wish theah wasn' no wall," Lem Bickel said slowly. "I like to see 'em bounce."

"See that?" I asked Hugh.

"A fluke," Hugh said. "Lamont put one down the slot. Even you could have hit it, Patsy."

"All right—" I was annoyed at the way they were taking the kid for a ride. "You've had your big laugh, Hugh, so now what?"

He was grinning peculiarly. His eyes were thoughtfully narrowed. "I think you've given me an idea," he said slowly. "What would you say, Pat, if I told you I was going to sign Laughable Lemuel to a provisional contract? Suppose I decided it would be good for the Green Sox just to have him kicking around?"

"But listen—"

"You listen to me," Hugh said. "I have little enough amusement in this vale of tears, Pat. I need a jolt in the funnybone now and then, and the boys could likewise stand one. As a matter of fact, Lem will probably teach those buzzards a thing or two. Maybe a couple of his beanballs will take some of that cockiness out of their craws. Lem's got the old pizazz, kid, and as long as he makes me laugh he stays on. I'll even take him to New York, maybe, for the opening game. There he gets a hundred bucks and we ship him back to Paraminton, Arkansas. What do you think?"

"I think you're Simon Legree," I said, "with the heart of Viper Fagin."

He just laughed at me.

And that is the way Lemuel Bickel joined the Green Sox. . . .

I USED to go over every day and watch the slaughter. Poor Lem never seemed to get tired of the ribbing. He took it all with a puzzled smile, always apologizing for his mistakes—which were plenty. It was awe-inspiring to hear him say he was going to line one out over Zinco's head and promptly lay the ball in the back stands on a terrific foul.

Once I talked with Frederick, the catcher. I asked him what the kid had.

"Boy," Frederick chuckled, "that kid has everything!" And then he'd laugh and laugh.

I said: "That smoke ball of his is pretty darn fast, isn't it? I can't even see it when he tosses it."

"It *is* fast," Frederick said. "Especially

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when he throws it at your dome and you have to duck. . . . Say, Pat, are you trying to make a pitcher out of the guy? Cut it out! He has a jughandle curve and a fair smoke ball and sometimes even a very decent downer. But no control, no control. He can't tell the home plate from a batter's fanny! He's terrible, Pat, don't kid yourself."

Then we started north. We were barnstorming with the Indians and two games were scheduled in Richmond, Virginia, over the weekend. After the first game, I found Lem Bickel sitting alone in the hotel lobby. He looked very sad: I stopped to talk with him. I felt rather sorry for the guy by then. He was a nice kid; you couldn't get away from that. He had a lot of charm.

"Hiya, Pat," he said quietly this night.

"Hello, Lem," I said. "Why aren't you out with the boys?"

"I reckon yo' know," he said. "They jest been makin' fun o' me th' whole time. Looka here." He held up a copy of the New York *Chronicle*. It was two days old but that didn't mean anything. He'd found it in the lobby apparently. He had it opened to the sports page and there was a story about himself among other Green Sox data. Jimmy Lane, of course, had been sending in some hot and funny stuff on the Green Sox' screwball and it made good copy.

"I reckon," Lem Bickel said, "I'd better be headin' on home soon. . . ."

I said, "I'm sorry, Lem. That's the truth."

"Thanks," he said quietly. "Yo' been awful nice t' me, Pat. I shore 'preciate it. But it ain't so much th' newspapers I mind. After th' first week, I knew they was jest takin' me fo' a ride fo' th' fun of it on 'count I played such terrible ball. Why, down in Paraminton I was a good ball player. I could hit 'em a mile and pitch like thunder, too. But I guess they tossed 'em slower for hittin', and the pitcher's box usta be nearer th' plate back home."

I frowned. "What do you mean, Lem?"

"Why," he said, shrugging, "somehow I jest can't keep track of the ball when they throw it up heah. And when I'm pitchin', I jest can't manage to see th' home plate."

I said: "You mean it's your eyes?"

"My eyes?" he said. "Now I never thought o' that. Suppose I might requah specs?"

"Listen, Lem," I said, quietly excited, "tomorrow you and I will run downtown and see an oculist. Ten o'clock. How about it?"

"Why, shore," Lem Bickel said. "Thet's mighty nice o' yo'."

We went down at ten next day and Lem was examined by a fussy little medico. It took about half an hour and when it was over, the medico told us: "This man is suffering from acute myopia. Nearsightedness. He should have been wearing glasses long ago. Here is the correct prescription. You had better fill it as soon as possible."

We were due to pass through Richmond again in three days. We dropped the prescription at an optician's, and in due course dropped in ourselves. Lem Bickel had a pair of white gold spectacles affixed to his face. He gasped at the result.

"Why, Pat," he said, "I never seen you like I see yo' through these specs. Why, good gorsh, Pat, yo' look swell! I kin see a mile with these specs!"

After that I got hold of a second string catcher named Crum who was good stuff and a nice guy besides. I swore him to silence and after the boys on the field had had their daily rib with Lem, I took Lem and Crum down under the grandstand and Lem would practice. I'd expected a lot then, but no go. The kid stayed bad. He had the stuff but he needed lots of work on it. I made Lem promise he'd never wear the glasses while he was on the field with the others and he didn't. After that we were together most of the time and it got so I was crazy about that kid and would have argued for him at the drop of a hat.

OPENING day! It came quickly. We pried loose the season against the Dodgers at the Green Sox Stadium. It was a beautiful blue-skied day and over the

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U-shaped grandstand the flags were flying gayly. Down on the left field bleachers the National League pennant flag was flying. It looked impressive. The place was loaded, especially the sun-seats. There was a band on the field and at one o'clock the music started. Both teams did a sloppy parade. Then Ump Mac Moran bellowed: *"Play ball!"* and the Mayor tossed out the old apple for the benefit of the photographers. The melee was on.

And what a brawl, what a brawl!

I watched the horrible details from the field box of Mr. Wilston Kenyon, no less, which meant that I was practically sitting in the Green Sox dugout. My job was to cover—oh, the indignity of it! the fashions and fancies of Miss and Mrs. Big Town as represented upon this gala occasion.

The batteries were Lamont and Frederick for the Sox, Frankhouse and Phelps for the Daffiness Boys. Frankhouse was a wily veteran who had given the Sox trouble over the years, and the fans were expecting a pitchers' battle. A hush settled over the stands as Buddy Hasset, the Dodger first-sacker, stepped to the plate.

Mr. Hasset sang the theme song of that afternoon's program by blasting the first pitch over Heinie Kraus' head at second. He stretched it to a double when Zinco fumbled momentarily in right field. What a yell rose from the throats of those fans from Greenpernt and the Gowanus!

Lavagetto was Dodger No. 2. He worked Frederick into the three-and-two hole, and then swung from his heels on the "must" pitch. His liner rifled into the upper right field stands just inside the foul line.

A homer, two runs across, and the game still wrapped in swaddling clothes.

You couldn't hear yourself think above the uproar. Those Brooklyn fans were cutting loose like a bunch of dervishes in the throes of delirium tremens. Winsett kept the heat on with a single off Shortstop Mike Grady's shins. Babe Phelps, the Human Blimp who handled the receiving for the minions of Burleigh Grimes, whacked a prodigious double against the left field fence. The panic was on!

Hugh Marranton, wild with fury, stormed out of the dugout. He signaled Lamont to the showers, and Lefty Kleng strolled in from the bull-pen. Joisey Joe Stripp, the Brooklyn third-baseman, greeted Lefty with a sizzler that almost tore his leg off. Manush poled a potent triple. And before the inning had come to an agonizing end, Lefty Kleng was consoling Lamont in the clubhouse and the Dodgers had chased six runs across the platter.

The grandstands, loaded with Brooklyn rooters, were having a wonderful time. Their seventh-place heroes were humbling the champions, and if you ever heard the Bronx cheer rendered in crescendo, fortissimo, you hard it that day. They clap-clapped the pitchers, they booed Hughie Marranton—mister, they were hog wild.

To cap the climax, the Dodger manager came out of the dugout and guffawed at Hughie for all to see. That bit of ridicule made Hugh the meanest, maddest man in all the world. He blew his top.

He wheeled on the string of pitchers that adorned the Green Sox bench. "Out to the bull-pen," he roared. "Out there—every damn' one of you!"

The hurling brigade, eight strong, waited not upon the order of their going. Even Lem Bickel, dazed with pride at the unexpected honor of being with the champions on this opening day, grabbed his glove and trotted along. I saw him go and my bright idea clicked. But I didn't let a peep out of me—not then.

Frankhouse had control, and the Sox were so riled they were biting at bad ones. Three up, three down. But the Dodgers still had their hitting clothes on. A double by Malinosky drove in three more runs and finished another Green Sox pitcher for the day. The team was jittery in the field, all thumbs. The players glared at each other—a first class example of big league heebie-jeebies.

By the time the fourth inning rolled around the score was eleven to nothing, and Hugh Marranton was a candidate for a straitjacket. He wasn't raving any more. A cold and silent anger held him. He stood

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near the bat rack with folded arms as his team came in at the end of the Dodger fourth. His glare would have made a good model for any inventor interested in developing the death-ray.

It was then I made my gamble. I hopped over the box rail and grabbed him by the arm.

"Scram, Pat!" he growled.

"You dope!" I yelled. "Don't you see what you're doing? You're going haywire —making a laughing stock of yourself. You'll ruin your team if you don't snap out of it!"

"I'll trade every man I got," he bellowed. "They can't lay down on me like that. I'll stop this bunch of Brooklyn semi-pros if I have to get in there myself!"

"Keep your shirt on, Hugh," I yelped. "They've got your nanny—got you on the run. They're laughing at *you*. So why not hand 'em back the laugh in spades? If they want clowning, give 'em clowning. Throw Lem Bickel in there."

His jaw dropped. He goggled at me. "That screwball—?"

"Yeah, that screwball! Don't you see? It'll make the game ludicrous. It'll show you're intentionally giving the fans some fun and they'll love you for it. It'll show you got a sense of humor. This game is dead duck—let it go. Put in the screwball and let the boys have sport."

He frowned at me. Then his jaw bulged with resolve. "Damned if I don't do it!" he roared. "They want to laugh—? All right, I'll give 'em something comic!" He bellowed to the field boy: "Tell 'em to have Lem Bickel ready to go in when we take the field." He glared around at his regulars: "All right, you clowns, let's see you laugh that one off!"

A MURMUR ran through the stands as the loud speaker opened the fifth inning with an announcement: "Bickel now pitching for the Green Sox. Bickel for O'Rourke." The sound swelled to a roar as the spectators caught the name. They remembered the newspaper stories about the rookie from Paraminton, Ark., and laughter was mixed with their hooting:

"Screwball! Screwball! Give us good ole Screwball!"

It was a tough moment for the kid. He had come in from the bull-pen dazed. He stood in the pitcher's box all jittery. He looked over at me once and grinned. I smiled back at him. Then I knew it would be okay. What Hugh Marranton had forgotten, I had remembered. Hugh Marranton had kept Lem Bickel along as a personal jester and hadn't seen that Bickel made the whole team laugh. I watched and waited.

Lem had a tough man to start with. Babe Phelps at the plate, swinging a bat as long and heavy as a telephone pole. Phelps looked the kid over, then grinned. "Come on, Screwball," he said, "lay one down the groove. We've got lots of balls to lose today."

Lem went into his dizzy windup and shot the ball in. It went like a streak. If a good hurler had used it, that pitch would have been a wow. Instead it hit Babe Phelps in the you-know-what. The Dodger catcher yipped like a wounded coyote.

Gus Frederick promptly laid down behind the platter, howling with laughter. Dilling nearly died at first. He clenched his stomach while he roared. Phelps trotted down to first, sore as a boiled owl.

Joe Stripp next. The first speed ball nearly took his head off. He dove into the dust, bellowing shrieks at Lem while the Green Sox roared from home plate to center field with riotous laughter.

"Is this a gag?" Stripp demanded, waving a bat. "Put one in here, hick, or else! And never mind the bean balls!"

"It's the sweat on my specs," Lem apologized. "I'm awful sorry I hit yo' befo'. I shore didn't mean to. I've wiped mah specs now and I'll see better."

He did. He saw too well. The third ball went straight over the plate. A sweet fast one. And Stripp walloped it high out into right field. It looked like a homer—but it wasn't.

Even Hugh Marranton said it was a miracle. But Zinco, running harder than

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he ever had in his life, speared the fly about three feet off the ground and then rolled onto the turf, still laughing at the picture of Phelps dancing around after that ball had hit him earlier.

"Hey—" Frederick yelled to Lem. "Never mind the sweat on your specs! Leave it there—leave it there, you hear me? Try to find the plate without seeing and maybe you won't put 'em over so straight!"

I thought Dilling would split wide open at that.

Manush, the old Detroiter, came up. He spent so much time ducking the balls that Lem threw that he missed three which happened to edge over a corner of the plate. A strikeout.

Johnny Cooney dove away from the first ball, a wild son of a gun that nearly caught him in the liver. But when he fell, the tip of his bat accidentally hit the pill and sent it bouncing easily down to first for a put-out.

You get the idea? It was that kind of a game. Absolutely, positively screwball from then on.

THE Green Sox got two runs in the fifth. They loosened up and started to hit. They were grinning from ear to ear and the ball game had become a big lark to them. They scored four more in the sixth, with Hugh Marranton getting the spirit of the thing and tossing in pinch hitters at the slightest provocation. A second-string catcher was playing third base when the seventh inning opened.

"You see?" I told him when he leaned against the box for a moment. "Lem Bickel is bad, sure. He's got the stuff to make a pitcher but he's got to learn and learn. But right now he's funny. He's so bad he's funny to his own team. It's made your boys loosen up and relax. They're playing *ball!* That's why Zinco nabbed that honey. That's why Heinie caught that last one ten feet—maybe it was less—over his head. They're playing baseball, Hugh, and all because their tension is gone and they feel good. Watch 'em now!"

We watched and marveled. Sometimes Lem would clean the perspiration off his glasses and put one over and it would be socked and socked hard. But the outer gardeners were all Tris Speakers, it suddenly seemed, and sure triples became miraculous outs. The infield was plucking line drives out of the stratosphere and converting them into double plays. Yep, the Green Sox had found themselves—and with a bang.

When the ninth inning rolled around, the Dodgers had sore knees from ducking bean balls, the Green Sox had sore ribs from laughing, and the stands were maniacal. Burleigh Grimes had seen Frankhouse blasted from the hill, Henshaw massacred, and had finally been compelled to call on his speedball ace, Van Mungo, when a Green Sox rally tied the count at 11-11.

There wasn't any getting away from it. The gag had worked. Lem Bickel was so mixed up in his deliveries himself, the Dodgers never knew what was coming. They were too ready to duck and that spoiled their batting eye. And when they did hit—which was often enough, Lord knows!—why, the Green Sox would work black magic.

The Dodgers came up with the first run off Lem in their half of this stanza—though they needed a hit batsman, a single, a double and a long fly to eke out this lone tally. Score: twelve to eleven—and Mungo strode to the mound to hold that winning edge.

Dilling faced him for the Green Sox, faced him with a broad grin. "Come on, guy," he called. "Put it within reach and I'll pin your ears back."

Mungo was not in a trifling mood. He threw two dusters that had Dilling on his spine. "Why, you big hillbilly," Dilling said, mad, and he slapped the next one down the center and left field alley and made second on it before he saw the outfielders were arguing about the ball. He went on to third then.

Next came Grady. But Mungo was pouring it in now. He struck the Irisher out with four pitched balls. Nice work.

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Then Gus Frederick. The catcher tossed a couple of swings but didn't do more than foul tip into the left field stands. He finally popped an infield fly that Lavagetto gobbled.

Two down. Man on third. Last inning. And Screwball Bickel coming up.

Here was a spot that wept for a pinch-hitter. Any kind of a hit would tie. But Hugh Marranton had swept his bench clean long before, and it was up to Lem to do or die.

Van Mungo looked the rookie over with a gleam in his eye. This guy had been spraying wild tosses at Mungo's head, and it was about time to fix him up with his own medicine. In a small way, of course. You couldn't take chances on a wild pitch with a man on third.

Mungo tossed in his famous speed ball and it must have clipped a whisker off Lem Bickel's chin. Lem dove into the dust with a wild yell and everybody roared. Umpire Moran cautioned Mungo, who said he was *so* sorry. The pitch, of course, was a ball.

The next one whizzed on a line with Lem's stomach. Lem fell over backwards, rolling away. But the outcurve had fooled him. It was a strike, a beauty.

Lem got up. You could almost hear him mumble: "Specs all sweated up a'gin. Better clean 'em so's I kin see the ball." He stepped out of the batter's box and cleaned his glasses on his sleeve.

Mungo had a wide grin. He knew he had Lem's number. He poised, then whipped over a pitch which sent Lem flying into Phelps as he ducked. The catcher caught the ball all right and Dilling didn't try to come home, but Lem and Phelps were a mass of spikes and twisted legs before they got to their feet.

The crowd was rocking with laughter. But my heart plummeted like lead.

Lem had broken his glasses in that fall.

He didn't say anything. He picked up his bat and stood in the box again, waiting. Mungo shot out his arm and pulled the ball in close to his chest. He watched Dilling for a moment, then turned his head, took in Lem Bickel from head to foot and finally flipped the ball. It came slowly, a great big beautiful floater. I winced, then groaned.

Lem started swinging blindly before the ball had reached the plate. I thought he had missed it altogether.

But uh-uh—

The very tip of his bat caught it, poked it down into the grass and sent it trickling toward third base at about five-tenths of a mile an hour. Lem dropped his willow and started sprinting wildly. Phelps went after the ball which had slowed down and was twisting toward the foul line. Phelps finally caught up with the pill, scooped it up, and wheeled and fired it at Buddy Hasset.

It should have been a beautiful put-out. Instead, it struck Lem on the right shoulder as he ran and glanced off to go shooting down the right field foul line.

The Green Sox coach at first base waved Lem on and he started churning dirt from his spikes! Dilling came home with the tieing score and stood by to watch what would happen. Hasset had faded back after the ball; Heinie Manush was coming in fast from right field. They reached the ball at the same time and had the most exquisite collision these young eyes ever beheld.

Lem Bickel passed second and was churning on to third.

Hasset, clenching the ball, finally reached his feet. He had had a severe shock and he was badly dazed. He threw to third with everything he had. He had more, I must say, than he should have had. He threw the ball high over third on a straight line and right into the left field grandstand.

Lem Bickel trotted home and the nightmare was over.

TWENTY minutes later, I was in the press room with the sports writers of all the other New York rags, waiting for the boys to get dressed and come out. I spied Hugh Marranton and he waved me into his office.

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"Pat," he said, "you must have prayed hard in that ninth inning."

"No harder than you did," I grinned. "The kid was all right, wasn't he, Hugh?"

"Nobody," Hugh said, "ever played in such luck before."

"Luck?" I said. "Oh. . . . Then you're turning him loose like you said you would? A hundred dollar bill and a ticket back to Paraminton?"

"Do I look like a dunce, Pat?" he growled. "He's terrible, kid, but he's got a load of what the Green Sox need. I'm keeping him on as a batting practice pitcher and pepper-upper. He's our good luck. The club secretary's drawing up a new contract at fifteen hundred iron men for the season."

"Not enough," I said. "Lem's worth twenty-five hundred."

He stared at me. "Says who?"

"Says me," I told him. "Lem's got new expenses now. There's an apartment to furnish, and a lot of other things. As Lem's manager I refuse to sign for a cent under twenty-five."

"Manager—?" he grunted. "Since when did you become Lem Bickel's manager, Patty?"

"Since," I replied candidly, "I became his wife three days ago. How do you like them berries?"

"His wife—" Hugh gasped.

"As sure," I said, "as my name used to be Patricia Helen Allen, the one and only daughter of Three-Fingered Allen!"

Crickets Seek Sponsor

YOU may think you've heard crickets chirping, but until you've listened to them over the public address amplifying system of the American Museum of Natural History you have no idea what the sound is really like.

Installation of a microphone in the crickets' glass case in the insect hall did the trick nicely, and the world, or so it seemed to those attending the broadcast, was filled with music. At least with what crickets think of as music.

Amplification of the familiar sound enabled Dr. Frank Lutz, the museum's entomological curator, to discover that the chirp attains a note two octaves above High C, or quite a way north of Lily Pons. A single chirp, according to the human ear, turned out to be, of all things, three distinct chirps, all sort of run together. Each part of a chirp, Dr. Lutz explained, takes about one two-hundredths of a second. There are three fast chirps, three preparations and four pauses to be got through before the cricket has finished with a chirp. No coda, though. The average chirp has a rate of about four thousand vibrations per second. Since the chirp is produced by the insect rubbing its wings together, the phrase "Lively as a cricket," takes on a new significance.

The cricket's noise, Dr. Lutz declared, has no emotional overtones. The theory that it is a love call, according to the scientist, is untenable. The female cannot chirp back and in fact doesn't seem to pay much attention. So it would appear that chirping is just something a cricket does to while away the tedious hours. Unless Major Bowes gets to hear about it.

—Albert George

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He kneeled beside the big gray and put his arms around its quivering, sweat-plastered neck

Grand National

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

PHILIP JADWIN hated horse racing—particularly steeplechasing. Hated it for what it could do to the animals he loved. But nevertheless he found himself slated to enter the only horse in his stable at the Grand National at Aintree—and the stake was a million dollar wager!

Years before, Philip's father—the famous, fabulous Lucky Jadwin—had bet Sir Humphrey Tarrant five hundred thousand dollars against Sir Humphrey's estates that before ten years were past, he or his son would be the owner of a Grand National winner.

Eight of the ten years went by. Lucky died, leaving Philip his stables, his debts and the five hundred thousand dollars staked for the wager. Even then Philip might not have entered Gray Dawn—if he hadn't hated Guy Tarrant so. Guy's taunts and cold arrogance roused in Philip the same hot fury that Sir Humphrey's had in Lucky Jadwin, and Philip found himself rushing into a madman's attempt to win that wager.

PHILIP is too poor to pay the training expenses and upon the persuasion of Connie Heath, who loves him, he accepts the offer of the *New York Globe* to back him in return for his exclusive story of the race. He had already refused racketeer Speed Carey's offer, because he didn't want the sort of crooked help Carey would give.

Later, Jessica Tarrant, violet-eyed and lovely, tells Philip that her brother has cut Carey in on the wager; and Philip knows that from now on he'll have to move with caution. Speed Carey makes his own odds.

THERE'S proof of this when an attempt is made to wreck Gray Dawn's motor van on the way to Dorchester. Connie's quick-wittedness saves the situation but Philip knows that Carey will try again. He has lunch in New York with Jessica who promises to help him in every way that she can. He is called to the telephone and when he returns, Jessica is gone. So is Speed Carey whom Philip had seen in the dining room a few minutes before.

Philip's fears that Carey may be holding Jessica prisoner are dispelled when Jimmy Baxter of the *Globe* tells him that both Guy and Jessica Tarrant have sailed back to England on the *Queen Mary*.

This story began in the Argosy for May 1

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The Dorchester Cup Race—America's steeplechase classic—is just the sort of workout that Gray Dawn, also known as "Bad Bill," needs to prepare him for Aintree. Jimmy Baxter has discovered that Montague Rayburn's horse, the Raven, may be a source of possible danger to Gray Dawn. Rayburn, at any rate, owes Speed Carey a large gambling debt and the Raven's rider is Shag Meadows, one of the toughest professionals in the business. But Jessica Tarrant had warned Philip of *two* danger points, and Baxter hasn't the faintest idea what the second may be.

NONE of which is exactly comforting to Philip. He determines to get Gray Dawn away from the post fast and keep him ahead the whole way, out of harm's reach. Just before post-time, Philip spots Guy Tarrant in the crowd. So the Tarrants didn't sail on the *Queen Mary*—and Jessica may really be in danger. . . .

Philip trembles as he climbs into the saddle, and the big horse feels taut, nervous, under him. Philip knows that he should be giving the horse some reassurance through his own steadiness. He catches the jockey on Crusader eying him in a disturbing way, and knows he's spotted his second enemy.

"You're going to have to go, son!" Philip whispers to Bad Bill. "You've got to break fast and stay in front! We can't afford to let them pocket us. We've got to—"

"Go!" The starter's voice cracks like a pistol shot.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE LAST JUMP

PHILIP chided himself bitterly for what the next few seconds brought. He hadn't been a hundred percent on the job. He'd been shocked by the surprise of seeing Guy Tarrant in the crowd—he'd been concentrating on Shag Meadows and Milliken, the two jockeys who were out to get him.

"You've gotta blot everythin' else out of your mind but your own horse at the start of any race!" he'd heard Danny say a thousand times. "The way you get off'll decide pretty well the way you finish."

He knew that in this moment he should have devoted every ounce of concentration he had to Bill, for the big gray was in an unfamiliar spot. He should have conveyed confidence and ease to the horse, but his own tightened nerves made that impossible. For just a few seconds after the roar of excitement went up from the crowd and hoofs suddenly thundered on turf as the horses broke from the starting gate, Philip failed at his job. Bill, bewildered and excited, reared slightly as horses ripped away from the barrier. A sharp order, a definite command from Philip, would have made all the difference.

Bill broke from the barrier all right, but he was not as quick as he had to be under the circumstances. Milliken on the Vickers entry had been hoping for just such a chance. Crusader, spurred to a state of hysterical excitement, plunged out of his starting stall and veered sharply in toward Bill. There were two other horses between Crusader and Bill, and the plunging bay jammed into both of them, hard.

A second roar broke from the crowd—a roar that had a different sound to it. Philip felt the leg of the jockey on the next horse grind painfully against his knee. He felt Bill stagger under the impact as the next horse came blundering into him. Drunkenly, the big gray went over toward the rail. Philip had been in the number three slot, with only one horse between him and the Raven who was on the rail. These two horses had broken fast, and as Bill went hard against the fence, there was the sound of splintering wood. Philip's heart was in his mouth. He tried to see if Bill had been injured by the splitting of the top fence rail, but Bill, startled, sprang forward, scraping Philip's leg cruelly against the fence, nearly wrenching him out of the saddle.

That forward leap of Bill's cleared the horse that was crowding him, and for a moment he was in the open, but Crusader, seemingly out of control, was right alongside, pressing him again almost instantly. For a second Philip saw the savage gleam of satisfaction in Milliken's eyes as Bill

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was once more thrown off stride. And then Milliken made a mistake. He struck out with his loaded crop and caught Bill a cruel blow across his bruised nose.

Philip felt as if concentrated dynamite had suddenly exploded under him. Bill gave a little squeal of pain and then did a sharp swerve to the right, straight into Crusader. The gray for just an instant was an irresistible and uncontrollable force. He plowed straight at his tormentor, and Philip heard the crowd screaming as Crusader stumbled and went to his knees. At the same instant Bill was in the clear and running like mad for the first jump.

Crusader and the two horses that had crowded into Bill were hopelessly out of it, and Bill was a good seventy-five yards behind the field, which had already taken the first jump. Philip's left leg was hurting him pretty badly, but he forgot everything else as he tried to master Bill's thundering rush, for the gray was racing for that first jump actually out of control—out of rhythm.

"Easy, son, easy!" Philip's voice was soothing, gentle. His hands were firm, applying steady pressure, as Philip tried to bring Bill down into his accustomed stride. For a minute he thought he wasn't going to make it. The way Bill was going he was almost certain to blunder at the first jump. Then, not twenty feet from that first rail fence, Bill suddenly settled into his regular sweeping stride and Philip felt him rise to the fence with all his wonderful power and ease.

"Nice going, fella!" Philip said, softly, as Bill lit on the other side and began to go again, now settled down to the job in hand.

Philip's voice was soft and confident, but fury was blazing in his heart, a fury so intense that the veins stood out at his temples and his eyes felt hot and stinging in their sockets. If Bill had plunged to the left instead of to the right when Milliken struck him, the chances were ten to one that the broken fence rail would have pierced his chest. And that would have been curtains for the big gray.

"I'll square that for you, Bill, so help me!" he heard himself saying as they pounded down on the second fence.

CONNIE HEATH sat in the front row of a front box in the grandstand. The crowd was on its feet, yelling and Connie knew that if anyone had been in front of her she could not have risen to see past them. She just sat where she was, feeling paralyzed and numb. She had expected Jimmy Baxter to join her before the start of the race, but he had failed to appear. Jimmy had told her that Shag Meadows on the Raven was the rider to watch—that there was someone else in the race who was dangerous too, but that they hadn't been able to spot him. Well, they'd found out quick enough. No one in the crowd around her, she knew, had guessed the truth. Everyone had believed that Crusader had gone berserk, out of his rider's control. The crowd didn't realize that it had witnessed a deliberate attempt to jam Gray Dawn through the fence.

The whole thing had seemed painfully, torturingly, drawn out to Connie—like the unreeling of a slow motion picture. When she'd heard the fence rail shatter—for it *could* be heard over the hubbub of the crowd—she had closed her eyes. When she had opened them again Crusader was down on his knees and Bill was on his way.

The race was taking shape now. With three horses out at the start, only eleven more were left, including Bill, and two of these went down in a mixup at the third fence, a stiff water jump guarded by a high brush hedge.

Bill was still behind the field but he had closed up almost fifty yards of the gap. Connie prayed that he would never catch them. Winning didn't matter right now. All that did was that Bill and Philip should come out of this alive, unhurt. Shag Meadows, up front, glanced back over his shoulder continually. He was holding the Raven down, fighting the black horse's effort to get his head.

"Jadwin'll never make it," said a man behind Connie. "It's too much to expect.

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He's lucky he wasn't cracked up for good at the start."

But if Bill and Philip had any intention of giving up their chance to win, it didn't show in the break-neck ride they were taking over the course. Bill was well in hand, but he was running powerfully—too powerfully, it seemed, for the beginning of a three-mile race. Connie's hands were tightly clenched.

"Be satisfied with coming out whole!" she said, softly, desperately. "You know what he can do, Philip! Don't risk anything more. Please! Please!"

ON RACED the gray. As the field took the sixth fence, Philip had caught the last horse. Edgecomb and Blue Sapphire were well out in front, with the Raven running a fighting third. The black was struggling with his rider, trying to catch the leaders, but Shag Meadows was holding him down, watching Philip's oncoming rush on the big gray.

Bill ran with his ears forward, eating up the ground with great long strides, jumping like an angel. Now he was eighth—now seventh—now sixth. Then the horse running fifth turned a spectacular somersault at the next fence, and Philip was fourth, running strongly behind the Raven. Connie drew a deep breath. Philip was now ready to come to grips with his surviving antagonist.

As Shag Meadows saw the gray coming up behind him he let the Raven out a notch, keeping him in front of Philip. A two-rail fence with a ditch on the far side was coming up and Bill was moving up perceptibly on the fighting Raven. Then Connie saw what was in Meadows' mind. Bill was coming up on the outside, and Meadows started to ease his horse toward the outside of the track. Slowly he was forcing Bill out—and Connie saw that Bill was going to have to take the jump dangerously close to the right-hand post. Philip saw it too, and somehow he managed to pull Bill down at the last moment and turn him in a trifle, just behind the Raven. The black and the gray took the jump tandem with Bill's nose almost on the Raven's tail.

Meadows opened up another notch as they made for the next jump. The Raven had been under wraps the whole way and he seemed to have plenty in reserve. Philip, riding almost up on Bill's neck, was grimly making up the space between him and the Raven. Bill's nose was at the black horse's flank, at his saddle girth, at his shoulder. And once more Meadows was forcing the Raven outward—further and further till it seemed that there would be no space left for Bill to take the jump.

It was a tight spot. A step or two before the take-off Bill forged a neck ahead of the black, and Connie saw Philip turn him in slightly—he had to turn him in to keep from jumping straight at the upright post. The Raven jumped at the same time, and, it seemed, with Bill cutting in so that the black horse must crash into them as they landed. Perhaps this was Meadows' intention, but the Raven wrenched himself sideward as he jumped and somehow both horses landed safely.

But Bill was ahead now—still running with those great powerful strides—half a length in front. Meadows took to the whip and the Raven spurted forward as whalebone cut at his flank. The crowd was in a frenzy of excitement. Neither Philip nor Meadows was paying the slightest attention to Edgecomb and Blue Sapphire who were still in front. These two seemed to be tiring and it was almost a certainty that the Raven and Bill would overtake them. The crowd didn't know the drama they were seeing—didn't realize that victory was not the stake here nor that Meadows was fighting to keep even with Bill so that he could force him to the outside of the track and to possible disaster.

Philip knew. Connie didn't have to be told that, when she saw his heels dig into Bill's sides. Connie felt her mouth go dry. It was too much to ask of the gray. He had given everything his lion's heart held to make up for his bad start. Philip should fall back. He was playing into Meadows' hands by riding up there with him. Connie

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suddenly heard herself shrieking, "Fall back, Philip! Fall back!"

BUT Bill, incredibly, still had something more to give. He met the driving challenge of the black and forged a neck in front. He couldn't shake off the Raven, though, couldn't forge far enough ahead to keep Meadows from gradually driving him toward the outside of the course. Connie closed her eyes. She couldn't bear to look. On one of those last three jumps Meadows would certainly manage to do what he wanted.

Philip Jadwin was showing all the mastery of horsemanship that he possessed as they came down toward the finish. Two more jumps. Philip knew that Bill was out to the last notch. If he tried to get anything more from him the gray would lose his rhythm—and that would be that. Glancing at Meadows Philip saw that the jockey's face was grim—grim and white. He had to get Philip on one of the next two jumps. The Raven had just a little more left in reserve than Bill. There'd been no heartbreaking gap for him to make up. He'd been well up the whole distance. That extra edge meant that the Raven wouldn't be—couldn't be—shaken off in this last drive for home.

Philip's hands tightened on the reins, and he began to ease Bill down, talking to him. The gray responded, although he seemed reluctant. Slower—slower.

Past Bill shot the black with Meadows sawing at his mouth. There was no slowing the Raven—and Philip had counted on that. Meadows took that next-to-last jump a full length in front of Bill, unable to get in the gray's way. Desperately the jockey was fighting to get the black under control.

"Quiet, Bill! Steady!" Philip's voice was cool as ice. Bill had an ear pricked back. They had caught Edgecomb and Blue Sapphire now. The Raven was out in front with Meadows standing up in his stirrups sawing at his mouth. Philip trailed him, stayed directly on his tail. Desperately Meadows looked around. The last jump was only fifty feet away. Meadows' face was the color of ashes. If he couldn't crowd Bill to trouble, there was only one thing he could do. He must jump across Bill's path and force a pile-up. It would mean broken bones—perhaps death. But Meadows was afraid not to risk it.

Meadows was looking back, trying to guess what Philip would do. Would he come up on the right or the left? Meadows had been crowding him out to the right for the last mile. With a chance to come in to the center of the jump he felt certain Philip would take it. Philip knew what Meadows was thinking, and he thought with him. As Meadows looked back a last time, Philip turned Bill's head toward the center of the jump. Philip's teeth were set so tightly together his jaws ached. Meadows was satisfied—turned front—and set himself for the jump.

IN that instant Philip swung sharply to the right. They were perilously close to the fence. For an instant Philip feared the gray would lose his stride—but he didn't. He sailed over the jump, inches from the upright. In the air Meadows saw he had been outguessed. He had started to take the fence at a diagonal to the left, and now in mid-air he tried to pull the Raven to the right.

The black horse was game. He had run a courageous race, but this last maneuver did for him. He was thrown off balance, and his legs crossed as he landed. Down he went, with Meadows thrown off to the right. Philip, looking back, felt his blood run cold as he saw the iron-shod hoofs of Blue Sapphire come down squarely on the fallen jockey's body.

With great, even strides Bill ran across the finish line a good five lengths in front of Edgecomb. The race was over. People were flocking down on the course. The bell of the ambulance clanged imperatively as it raced to the point where Meadows lay in the dirt, very still, one arm grotesquely crumpled under him.

Very slowly Philip pulled in Bill and turned him.

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"You old son of a gun!" he said gently, his hand stroking the sweating neck. Bill was breathing hard, and his silvery flanks glistened. Out of the crowd burst Danny, his face like chalk, and streaked with tears.

His gnarled old hands gently stroked the horse, and Bill gave him a little nudge.

Philip's face was grim. "Meadows had a bad spill there," he said to Danny.

"He's done for," said Danny harshly. "Blue Sapphire smashed his skull like an egg shell!"

"We've got to go back to the judges' stand for the cup, Danny," said Philip. "Take his head."

People swarmed at the finish line. A radio announcer fought to get at Philip with a portable microphone. Somebody was trying to fit a great horseshoe of flowers over Bill's neck. An important looking little man with a waxed mustache, the donor of the gold cup, was trying to make some sort of presentation speech which was completely drowned out in the commotion. And then Philip saw Connie. Somehow she fought her way to his side—reached up and clutched at his knee as he sat there in the saddle.

"Philip! Oh Philip!" she cried, brokenly. "You're all right? Bill's all right?"

"Sure. Sure, we're all right," Philip said.

Connie suddenly felt very cold, very tired. Philip was not looking at her as he spoke. Instead his eyes were anxiously searching the crowd for someone else.

CHAPTER XVII

THE JADWIN TOUCH

PHILIP leaned down to speak to her. "Have you seen Baxter?" he asked.

"No. Not since before the race," Connie said, her voice still a trifle unsteady. "He was to join me—but he didn't show up."

"Tarrant's here," Said Philip grimly. "It means that he and Jessica *didn't* sail on the *Queen Mary*. It means that he and Carey are keeping her somewhere! I'd give anything to get my hands on them."

Connie looked at his face, tense and drawn by fatigue and strain. For days she had been trying to tell herself that she was a fool—a jealous little fool. After all, Jessica Tarrant had done him a favor. His concern for her was quite natural. It didn't mean anything else to him but that. And yet as she looked at him now . . .

"I sent Baxter to try to locate Tarrant in the crowd," Philip was saying. "We've got to find out what they've done to her."

"If—if I see him I'll tell him you're anxious to know if he found Tarrant," she said, and turned away.

Danny was tugging at Bill's bridle now, and slowly they moved down the track toward the stables. A crowd still milled around them. Excited people snatched at Bill's collar of flowers, grabbing blossoms for keepsakes. Men shouted at Philip.

"You've got a world beater there, Jadwin . . ."

"A million bucks in the bag . . ."

Philip heard nothing. Bill eyed the excited spectators with a sort of calm, cool interest, and picked his way through the crowd very much at ease. And all the time Danny crooned to him, "Oh you lovely! You crazy, fighting fool!"

For Danny knew that Bill had extricated himself from the first jam in the race without Philip's help. Danny had eyes. He knew that Philip hadn't been on the job at the start. He knew that but for Bill's savage charge into Milliken on Crusader that the gray would have been forced through the fence.

Delaney and his men had managed to get into position around the horse and when Bill was finally led into his stall they kept the crowd back. Philip stood with them, nervously smoking a cigarette, waiting for Baxter. Danny worked on the horse, rubbing him dry, whistling softly as he worked. Danny needed to know no more. Bill could take it. Bill was ready to go. Bill was the greatest damned horse that Danny had seen in his forty years on the turf. Bill reached out and fumbled at Danny's shoulder with his lips, and for an instant Danny pressed his weather-beaten cheek again the horse's warm, soft nose.

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"Mystery horse my foot!" said Danny softly. "The whole world knows what ye are now, Bill. And may them fiends sweat the cold sweat of fear in their beds when they think of what ye'll be doin' to them when they take ye to England!"

BAXTER didn't show up at the stables. After what seemed an interminable wait Philip decided to go back to the inn, and he left word at the stable for Baxter to find him there.

"Come over yourself, Danny, when you're through with Bill," Philip said.

"Oh, you'll be celebratin', Mr. Philip," said Danny.

"I want you to come, Danny. There'll be no celebrating. I've got something I want to talk over with you and Mr. Baxter."

"I'll be there, sir, in about an hour," said Danny.

Philip wished he had asked Connie to come along. He wanted her advice. But the idea that had formed itself in his mind hadn't occurred to him until after she had left him out there on the track.

In his room at the inn Philip paced up and down, smoking his pipe with his teeth set hard on the stem. He had poured himself a whiskey and soda and presently he felt himself relaxing a little; but his eyes were very bright, almost feverish. He was just about to pour himself another drink when someone knocked at his door.

It was Baxter, looking slightly bedraggled, and with an expression on his face which Philip could not misread.

"No luck, eh?" said Philip.

Baxter shook his head. "He knew you'd spotted him and ducked. There wasn't a chance in a million of my finding him if he wanted to stay out of my way. I'm sorry, Philip. It looks as though I'd bungled things."

"Maybe not," said Philip, tamping down the tobacco in his pipe. "I don't think I'd ever have gone on with things if I'd known Carey was holding Jessica somewhere. And now—well, now I have an idea."

Baxter sank down in an armchair and accepted the drink Philip fixed for him. "Before I hear any ideas," he said, "I want to tell you that was probably the greatest piece of riding I ever saw, Philip. I—I had to watch, once the race got under way. I thought sure you were done before you started—and after that I *knew* Shag Meadows was going to get you on one of those last few jumps. He—he died, by the way. Before they got him to the hospital. He didn't talk."

Philip was scowling, chewing on the stem of his pipe. "A nice little picnic this turned out to be, Baxter."

"Charming," said Baxter.

And then Danny arrived—Danny, beaming like an Elizabethan monk. "Tucked in he is, sir, and never battin' an eyelash. You'd think a life-and-death run like that was no more than a gallop over the meadow."

Philip nodded. "You'd say he had just about everything it takes, wouldn't you, Danny?"

"That's right, sir. He'd've run the Grand National today, sir, and won it, too—trainin' or no trainin'."

"That's the way I see it," Philip said slowly. He struck a match and held it to the bowl of his pipe. Then he looked sharply at his two friends. "Listen," he said, "and hold onto your chairs, both of you. We planned to bring Bill along slowly during the next year, take him to England next fall, get him slowly into shape."

"That's right, sir," Danny nodded.

"Well, you know what that means," said Philip grimly. "It means months and months of strain and tension. It means months of battling with Carey and the Tarrants. It means they'll have ample opportunity to try again and again to put Bill out of commission. They've failed twice, now. But soon they'll have better luck. I don't believe we'd ever get him to Aintree next year."

Danny nodded somberly. "I was thinkin' that while I dried him out, sir. Detectives and all—sooner or later they'll get to him."

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Baxter drained his glass and put it down on the table rather sharply. "After watching that race this afternoon I don't blame you for giving up, Philip," he said. "You got out of that. You won't get out of another one. I guess I was crazy to think we could buck Carey. No, I don't blame you, Philip. If I were in your boots I'd quit cold!"

"Who said anything about quitting?" said Philip, harshly. "We've been aiming at next year's race. But it's only three weeks before this year's Grand National is run. What would happen if we shipped Bill at once—ran him in this year's race?"

THERE was a moment of dead silence. Then Baxter said, "You're nuts!"

"But he's not entered, sir!" Danny expostulated.

"I've got a hunch we could wangle it," said Philip. "Lucky made an entry every year. I'm not sure he didn't make one this year before he died. In any case, I've got a hunch the National Hunt Committee that runs the show could be persuaded to accept our entry if they understood the facts."

"But there's the sweepstake, sir—the lottery!" Danny protested.

"It hasn't been drawn yet and won't be for several days. But I haven't explained the whole of this to you. My idea is to jump the gun on Carey. I want to ship the horse out of the country without his knowing it."

"Impossible," said Baxter. "They're watching you and the horse like hawks!"

"Maybe you think this is a pipe dream," said Philip, "but here's the way I see it. You'd have to make all the arrangements about passage. There must be a boat in the next few days that we can ship Bill on. My idea would be to dig up another gray horse somewhere. When we ship Bill away from here we'll manage to substitute another horse for him. Danny goes back to the farm with the phony and acts as if everything is as usual. You and I go to England with Bill."

"Mr. Philip!" Danny wailed. "You mean you aren't figgerin' to take me?"

"Take it easy, Danny. You'd stay here for a few days to keep them fooled. We'd have Delaney and his boys guarding you and the phony horse just as they have been. If we can get Bill to England without Carey knowing it, we're over the worst hurdle. I've been worried sick about the voyage, and about landing him and shipping him about in a strange country. If Carey doesn't get wise—well, we'll have smooth sailing. The minute we land you can take a fast boat to England."

Baxter brought his hand down sharply on the arm of his chair. "Lord, Philip, it's crazy—but it's wonderful."

"The biggest part of the job is yours, Baxter," said Philip. "You'll have to arrange for the entry secretly through your paper. You'll have to book passage, preferably under assumed names both for us and for Bill. You'll have to arrange for putting a phony horse on Danny's farm. Danny and I have got to act as though everything was quite normal."

"It's a big order, but I can't do any worse than try!" said Baxter. Then his face clouded. "But what about Jessica Tarrant?"

"Listen," said Philip, in a hard voice. "They aren't going to murder her! They aren't going to harm her! Her brother and father are in on this. They're simply keeping her under cover so she can't communicate with me. I think they hoped I might throw up the sponge to get her out of an unpleasant position. Well, I'm not going to throw up the sponge—but I'm going to get this thing over with as quickly as possible! And when that's done," he concluded grimly, "perhaps I'll settle Jessica's account with her brother and father personally!"

"It makes sense," admitted Baxter.

"I may be spoiling my chances of winning at Aintree by running Bill before he's ready," Philip went on, "but, somehow, after today, I'm ready to put him to the big test without any more fooling around!"

"He's as ready as he'll ever be," said Danny confidently. "There ain't anythin'

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a man can do to improve him, Mr. Philip."

Baxter laughed. "I think the whole scheme is cockeyed," he said, "and a stroke of genius! It's the sort of stunt your father would have pulled."

"Then you've got to get going," said Philip. "We're supposed to leave here with Bill tomorrow. The whole thing must be arranged by then."

CHAPTER XVIII

EVERY RED CENT

PHILIP was wakened from a very sound sleep about five o'clock the next morning by a vigorous knocking on his door. It was Baxter, back from a flying trip to New York. He looked tired but his eyes were bright with excitement.

"It can be done!" he told Philip eagerly, as he poured himself a drink. "And don't ever say that Jimmy Baxter isn't one of the world's greatest little organizers. Hell, I'm wasting my time in the newspaper business."

Philip stirred impatiently in his chair. "Well, let's have it!"

"The entry was the thing that bothered me most," said Baxter. "The paper stood for a transatlantic phone call to Mr. Hilary French in London—he's Chairman of the National Hunt Committee. You were right about your father. He seems to have done everything in a lavish way, even when he was broke. He nominated his whole string for the race this year—and by some stroke of luck Gray Dawn was among 'em. Your old man wasn't taking any chances of having a good horse out in the cold!"

"This business meant everything to Lucky!" said Philip.

"Well, all you have to do is pay the additional entry fee—and we cabled the money from the office, just to make sure of no slip-up. Mr. French, who sounded like a good guy, agreed to keep the matter quiet until the drawings, which are just seven days off. Of course, when the horses are drawn for the sweepstakes somebody will get Bill. You know," and Baxter laughed, "that's an angle I'd forgotten about. There'll be somebody holding a ticket on Bill who'll stand to win a fortune if he wins."

"Get on with the rest of it," Philip said.

"Boat comes next. Tomorrow night at midnight the *Oceanic* sails for good ol' Liverpool. They're carrying other horses. There's a place reserved for Bill and you can load him any time between now and then."

"Tomorrow!" Philip felt his heart constricting. "But, Jimmy, I haven't any passport—any—"

"The paper's fixing that," said Baxter with a grin. "Drag in Washington and all that sort of thing. You'll have to take time off to get yourself mugged, but that's all. You'll be down on the passenger list under an assumed name. Meanwhile we'll run stuff in the paper that will deal with your imaginary doings here."

"But the big part is sneaking Bill aboard!" said Philip.

"I told you I was a great organizer, and I'm only just beginning to unfold to you the depths of my genius," Baxter laughed. "Here's how it's done. My brother is a member of the Squadron. Believe it or not he had an old gray jumper up there that he's kept for years. I had to let him in on things and he's willing to play ball with us. We can have his horse for the week that it will be necessary."

"How do we make the substitution?" Philip asked.

"Like rolling off a log," said Baxter. "My brother's horse will be taken up to Danny's farm today. The place isn't under observation now. You ship Bill from here late this evening—so he'll get home after dark. Be as ostentatious about it as possible. You'll truck Bill straight to the farm in case anybody's following or watching. But when you get to the barn and back up the truck, you simply don't unload him. From there you take him straight to the boat. Tomorrow Danny can fool around with my brother's horse and unless they're suspicious they'll never realize that it isn't Bill—that is, from a distance."

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"And if anything happens to your brother's horse?" Philip asked, frowning.

"He's set a price of two hundred bucks on him," said Baxter glibly. "We pay the freight if he's injured in any way."

Philip felt a little dazed by the completeness of Baxter's planning, and the suddenness with which they must act. "It sounds like a tight enough scheme," he said.

"I don't see any loopholes myself," said Baxter. "If worse comes to worst, Carey will find out in a day or two that you've slipped one over on him, but by that time you'll be on the high seas."

"But you're coming with me, of course!" said Philip.

Baxter shook his head. "I'm staying here, writing a daily story about you, and appearing as much as possible in places where Carey's men are likely to hang out. The minute you land I hotfoot it for England. I think it's smarter for me to stay here and put on an act as a blind."

Philip reached out, took a cigarette from a package on the table, and lit it. His fingers were not quite steady. "I'm sure this is the right play," he said, as if to convince himself. "The other way we have months and months of nerve-racking tension and almost inevitable failure. This way . . ."

"Listen, fella," said Baxter, jovially, "three weeks from tomorrow you'll be richer by one million smackers—not to mention the winner's purse—not to mention a great deal more if you use your head and bet every red cent you've got on Bill. That gray son of a gun is going to make bloody capitalists out of the bunch of us—I hope!" he added with his fingers crossed.

THERE was no sleep for Philip in his keyed-up condition, but Baxter, exhausted from the night's work, flopped on Philip's bed and slept like a log. Philip had breakfast at seven and then went out to the stables where he confided the whole scheme to Danny and to Delaney, the detective. They did all their talking just outside Bill's stall, and the big gray stuck his head out the top of the Dutch door and looked very wise, fumbling at Philip's coat sleeve with his lip, and finally giving Philip a little nip when Philip failed to pay any attention to him.

Directly after that Philip took an early train to New York to have his passport picture taken. When this had been done he called Connie—to be informed by the Heaths' butler that Miss Constance had spent the night with friends in the country, what friends the butler couldn't say. And he couldn't say either just when Miss Constance might be expected.

Philip was disturbed, because he had wanted to see Connie and explain the whole scheme to her. He called her several times during the day, only to get the same news. Philip was vaguely uneasy about Connie. She'd been acting peculiarly the past few weeks. Philip had decided that she felt out of things since Baxter and the *Globe* had taken charge of his affairs. He whiled away the time reading the accounts of yesterday's race in all the papers, and smiled grimly at the complete absence of any reference to foul play. Of course they talked at length about the "tragedy" of the accident to Shag Meadows at the last jump. They talked of Bill's gallant run after Crusader had nearly done for him at the start. They were all unanimous in their opinion of Bill. He was the greatest steeplechaser in the world. He could jump perfectly, and he could run like a flat racer.

"It seems a pity," remarked one writer, "that we must wait a year before this horse competes in the Grand National. It's a pity, because I can't wait to put my money on him."

What a rush of newspaper men there would be to England when it was learned that Bill was to compete this year! He wondered what was on Carey's mind today. Speed must be feeling a little grim. Meadows' death at the track came perilously close to murder, ethically if not legally, for Meadows had been carrying out Speed's orders. Philip suspected that

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Carey would be less concerned about this than the fact that Meadows had failed.

The truck to take Bill to Connecticut was due in Dorchester at six o'clock, which meant that Philip had to take the 4:10 train from Grand Central to be there when it arrived. He called Connie for the last time just before he got on the train, without result. Well, he'd locate her before sailing time, which was nearly thirty-eight hours away.

There was quite a big crowd at the Dorchester stables when Bill, bandaged and hooded, was led onto the big truck. News camera men were there to take pictures of him. Reporters asked Philip for statements.

"We have a long time to get him ready for Aintree," Philip told them. "Barring accident, he should have a very good chance to win it next year."

Danny rode on the truck again, and Philip and Baxter went ahead in a car which Baxter had hired. They went over their plans on the drive to Connecticut.

"You're to go straight to the *Oceanic* as soon as we've got through with this trip to Connecticut," Baxter said. "My advice is to stay put on the boat till she sails. By the way, you're traveling under the name of Phelps Jenkins, like it or not. I picked something with your initials in case your luggage was marked."

"Don't they know on the *Oceanic* who I am?"

"The captain and the purser—that's all. I think they can be trusted."

Philip frowned. "I had wanted to see Connie. I tried to reach her all day but she evidently went to some friend's place in the country after the race. In case I don't locate her, Jimmy, you'll have to explain for me. I wanted her in on this—expected she'd come to the stable after the race. Now things have happened so fast. Will you tell her I wanted her to know? And of course I'll expect her to come to England as quickly as she can get away. The damned race wouldn't be legal if she wasn't there," he said, with a curious little smile.

Baxter studied the end of his cigarette. He was debating whether he should tell Philip that he knew what was troubling Connie. He decided it was none of his business.

"I'll square things for you," he said. And then after a moment of silence he added, "She's a great girl, Philip."

"Best in the world," said Philip.

"You two are planning to get married?" Baxter's glance was sharp, questioning.

"That," said Philip, "is up to Bill!"

IT was pitch dark when the horse truck turned into the yard of Danny's farm and backed slowly up to the barn door. Philip and Baxter were already there. Baxter's brother's horse was already in Bill's stall.

"I'm positive we weren't followed," said Baxter. "And if we were they won't be able to tell in the dark whether we're unloading or not. In a few minutes you can head straight for the boat."

Philip nodded. And then Danny drew him aside out of earshot of the others. He sounded almost apologetic.

"I've written down a—a list of things to do for Bill, Mr. Philip," he said. "I've put down how much he gets fed regular, an' all that. But on the boat, now, you'll want to cut down on his grain, an'—an' well, kind of keep an eye on him, sir. He's used to company, Bill is. Hell, sir, I've hardly been away from him except to sleep in the last six weeks. He's used to someone talkin' to him an' makin' a fuss over him."

"I'll follow your instructions to the T, Danny," Philip assured him, slipping the paper in his pocket. "Mr. Baxter's arranging for your passage. You'll be at Aintree a week before the race—plenty of time to help draw his condition down fine."

Danny shook his head. "I—I hate to leave him, sir. But I see it may make things safer for him."

"I think it will, Danny."

"Yes—yes, sure it will, sir. An' when you get him there, work him awful easy at first. No jumpin', sir. If you have any

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rough weather he's likely to be sore—might even wrench a muscle or somethin'. You got to make sure of that before you give him anythin' hard to do." He shook his head. "You'll only have ten or twelve days to get him back into top shape after you land—which ain't much, sir. A crossin' takes a lot out of 'em, specially if they get sea sick, which plenty of 'em do."

"I'll be careful of him, Danny."

"I know you will, Mr. Philip," said Danny.

They went back to the truck and Danny climbed up into it. He stood by the big gray horse for a minute, fondling the soft nose, stroking the long neck.

"Good luck to ye, Bill," he whispered. "Good luck to ye, an' stay out of mischief ye black-hearted—black-hearted—" For an instant the old man buried his face in the horse's mane. Then he gave him a gentle slap on the shoulder and came out of the truck. In the darkness the suspicious wetness of his eyes was not noticeable.

CHAPTER XIX

"THAT'S HIM"

THERE was no sleep for Danny Shane that night. He sat in an old rocking chair in his sister's kitchen and watched the battered alarm clock on the shelf ticking away the hours.

"They'll be just about reachin' New York now," he announced at one juncture.

Mrs. Weston, who was busily hemstitching new curtains for the parlor, looked up at him and sniffed. "You ain't doin' them any good sittin' here frettin'," she told him. "Why don't you go to bed? It's way past your regular time."

But Danny shook his head and sat there, rocking back and forth, sucking on his old clay pipe. The place felt empty without Bill. He had felt secure with Bill out there in the barn—had felt somehow that he was safe there. He could hear the strange horse moving around, just the way Bill had moved, but it was different.

"I can remember when we had to load horses on boats with a swing," he said. "That scared 'em half to death. Now they walk on the boat on a gangplank, just like any person."

Mrs. Weston said nothing.

"They should be on board by now," said Danny, after another hour had passed. "I hope Mr. Philip sees to it he's got a deep bed o' straw. They're stingy with beddin' on them ships unless you crack a whip over 'em."

"Daniel Shane!" exclaimed Mrs. Weston, impatiently, "don't you think Philip Jadwin is just as concerned about that horse as you are—even if he don't flutter around him like an old woman? You've said a dozen times that he had the right *feeling* about horses. Why don't you let it go and go on to bed?"

But Danny just sat there rocking, and when Mrs. Weston finally went to bed herself he was still mumbling about the kind of care Bill would get on the ship if Philip didn't watch out for him. He was still in the chair dozing fitfully when Mrs. Weston came down the next morning to get breakfast.

It was a long day for Danny. The *Oceanic* wasn't due to sail till midnight, and Danny's mind was never far from Bill and Philip. He had hoped to get some word from Philip that they were safely aboard, but none came. He knew that Philip meant to lie low, and the *Oceanic* wasn't one of the newest boats. Maybe there weren't telephones on board, and maybe Philip wouldn't want to show himself on the dock. After his picture being in the paper so often he'd be almost bound to be recognized. If anything had gone wrong, Danny told himself, he would have been informed. As nearly as he could determine there was no particular watch being kept on the farm. As a matter of fact, he didn't glimpse anyone all day who looked suspicious.

But the tension persisted.

"I guess Carey saw enough of that horse to last him quite a while back at Dorchester," said Delaney, the detective. "I've got a hunch they'll plan to wait till he races again before they try anythin'."

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BUT he had underestimated Speed Carey's fine thoroughness when he had something on his mind, as Danny was to discover presently. About four o'clock Delaney relaxed his vigil for the first time in week.

"I think I'll go down to the village and see if I can pick up somethin' to read," he told Danny. "I don't think there's anythin' to worry about here."

Afterwards Danny knew he should have protested against this. The plan was to make it seem they were just as concerned as ever, but there *was* no sign of anyone hanging about. So Delaney went.

Danny, with nothing to do, went to the stable. Baxter's brother's horse, whose name was Pepper, looked at Danny with an unfriendly eye and ears laid back. Danny sighed.

" 'Tis only a blind man would mistake you for my Bill," he said to the horse. "You've a mean disposition, an' a nasty eye, you've got no shoulders to you like my Bill has, an' your withers is low and of no consequence, and two hundred dollars is a king's ransom for the likes of ye." And having told Pepper off, Danny stuck a straw in his mouth and went into the horse's stall. "All the same, you've got to be cleaned an' tended to, like you was somebody! There's no horse comes out of Danny Shane's barn that don't look the better for his stay."

So Pepper was brought out onto the barn floor and tied there. Danny proceeded to go to work on him with a curry comb, grumbling, and calling the horse by an elaborate series of unprintable names. Then came a moment that was to bring disaster. Danny, scraping at the horse's belly with the curry comb, turned away to spit out the straw he'd been chewing. Pepper, annoyed by the currying, gave a lurch forward and the halter broke. With a great clatter of hoofs he dashed out into the yard and on into the paddock beyond, kicking up his heels and having himself a time.

Danny swore softly. Then he went to the feed bin for a measure of grain, got an unbroken halter, and set out to lure Pepper back into his clutches. Pepper was having none of it. He raced around the paddock, kicking and squealing with delight. Having been kept in the city for a long time before this, Pepper was enjoying his spree. Danny knew it was useless to try to catch him until he'd had his fill, so he leaned against the paddock fence and watched the horse play.

He didn't hear the footsteps come across the lawn behind him . . . didn't realize that anyone was near him until a hand with cruelly strong fingers closed over his shoulder. Danny turned with an oath to look into the cold, hard face of a stranger.

"What horse is that?" snapped the stranger, regarding Pepper with frosty eyes.

"That'll be none of your damned business!" Danny rapped.

"What horse is it, punk?" said the man, and his fingers bit painfully into Danny's flesh. Danny almost cried out with the pain of it. But he kept his head.

"That's Gray Dawn, Mr. Philip Jadwin's horse what won the gold cup at Dorchester the day before yesterday," he said, "if it's anythin' to you."

"Nuts!" said the man coldly. "That's no more Gray Dawn than I am. Where's the other horse—the real horse?"

"That's him, I tell you!" said Dan desperately.

"Listen, Jack," said the man softly, "don't hand me none of that hooey. I know Jadwin's horse when I see him. Let's go back to the barn and have a look."

AGAINST his will and with his heart beating like a trip-hammer against his ribs Danny went back to the barn with the man—was dragged back. The man took one look into the empty stable. Then he turned on Danny and his eyes, like yellow slits of fire, blazed angrily.

"Where's Gray Dawn?" he demanded.

"I keep tellin' you, that's him out there. That's him in the paddock."

The man's hand shot out and struck Danny a stinging blow on the face.

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Danny drew a deep breath, and his gnarled fists were clenched tightly. "You can boil me in oil," he said, "you can do anythin' you've a mind to with me, and I'll keep on tellin' you it's none of my affair."

The man stood looking at Danny, rocking back and forth on his heels, his lower lip caught between his teeth. Then he seemed to make a decision. "Okay, Jack," he said. "Have it your way." And he walked out of the barn, leaving Danny leaning against the wall with little beads of sweat standing out on his forehead.

Danny was in a frenzy of alarm. Delaney didn't come back. After he had waited in a state bordering on hysterics for nearly an hour Danny put in a call for Jimmy Baxter on his sister's telephone. Baxter was not at the *Globe* office. Danny left word that it was of vital importance for him to call Danny the minute they could find him.

Danny called the Heath residence and got the butler. Miss Constance was out of town. No, he didn't know where Miss Constance could be reached.

Danny, wringing his hands and moaning, stared stupidly at the supper Mrs. Weston put before him.

"You've got to eat your supper," she said matter-of-factly. "Not eatin' ain't going to help matters, Daniel. Mr. Delaney is probably on the trail of the man that was here. He probably saw him and follered him."

Danny tried to comfort himself with that notion, but it didn't *feel* right to him. Delaney's orders were to stay here. Delaney hadn't come back for some other reason. Just how sinister that reason was Danny couldn't guess. Maybe he had just convinced himself there wasn't any danger and gone off on a toot.

One thing had been thoroughly impressed on Danny. He mustn't try to communicate with Philip on the *Oceanic*. If there was anything Philip should know, Baxter would do the communicating. Again and again, as the evening dragged on—dragged on with Danny in a shivering sweat of fear—Danny called the *Globe*. Baxter still had not been reached. Time dragged on and on. Had that man been able to find out where Bill had been taken? Would they be able to trace the truck? Why hadn't Delaney come back? At that instant Danny trusted no one. Maybe Delaney had doublecrossed them. Where *was* Mr. Baxter?

IT was a quarter past one in the morning when Jimmy Baxter called the farmhouse. In a hoarse, exhausted voice, Danny told him what had happened. Baxter swore.

"And Delaney hasn't come back? No word from him?"

"None, sir. If anythin' happens to Bill and Mr. Philip through lettin' that horse get loose—"

"Keep your shirt on, Danny. You didn't say anything about boats to this guy—you didn't tell him anything?"

"No, sir."

"Then the chances are they haven't been able to trace Bill and Philip at all. The trail was pretty carefully covered. The boat sailed over an hour ago and they're probably quite safe. But I'll radio Philip and tell him to watch his step. It's too bad they've found out so soon, Danny, but don't worry yourself sick over it."

"It's pretty hard, sir, not to."

"I know. But with any luck they'll be guessing for days. I'll send out a couple of guys at once to be with you. I don't want you alone in case they come back and try to make you talk. Got a gun, Danny?"

"Y-yes, sir. An' old shotgun, sir!"

"Keep it handy till my men come—and use it if anybody tries to bother you! And let me know at once if Delaney comes back," Baxter ordered.

IT had been a long nerve-racking day for Philip Jadwin. He had spent it all between his cabin and the hold of the ship which had been turned into a stable. There were about twenty other horses on the *Oceanic*, all of them studs and brood

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mares of workhorse type which were on the first leg of a long journey to Russia. They have no box stalls on a ship as the horses are apt to bang themselves up badly if there is any motion. Bill had boarded the ship without question. Philip had led him up the gangplank and into the hold, talking to him gently, and the gray seemed to accept his master's word for the fact that everything was all right. He held his head very high and picked up his feet in a gingerly fashion, but he wasn't excited or fretful.

Bill seemed content with his stall despite the fact that it was a space considerably more confined than he was accustomed to. Philip slept on a cot in the hold, despite the assurance of the stableman that Bill would be all right. Philip was trusting no one yet, though the stableman who gave no other name than Pat, seemed to be an honest sort.

All the next day Philip kept watch over the horse as people came and went on the ship. No one paid the slightest attention to him or to Bill. But it wasn't till the ship's engines began to throb that Philip felt better. As the ship's vibration shook the hold most of the horses started raising the devil. Philip went in the stall with Bill, stroked him, talked to him. Bill was very nervous, but he stood quietly, looking around him as if he were trying to ascertain the cause of all the shaking and clamor.

At last they were under way and Philip went up on deck for a breath of air. It was a beautiful, moonlit night, and the waters of the harbor were as smooth as glass. He leaned over the rail idly, watching the pilot boat as it came alongside.

He noticed that there were two men standing in the bow of the boat, who carried luggage. One of them was an elderly man. Philip could see the white hair under the brim of his hat. The other was a Negro, short, squat, with long, apelike arms.

When the rope ladder was lowered, these two climbed aboard. Ropes were lowered to pull up their bags. Philip turned to one of the ship's officers who was nearby.

"What's up?"

The officer shrugged. "Chap connected with these workhorses we're carrying and one of his stable hands, I believe," he said. "Missed the ship at the dock but were lucky enough to catch the pilot boat."

Philip flicked his cigarette over the side and yawned. He badly needed sleep, and it never occurred to him to suspect that the white-haired man and the Negro were in any way connected with him. Satisfied that danger was passed till they reached England, he turned and went down to his stateroom.

As he went through the companionway, the Negro nudged the old man. "That's him," he said, his teeth flashing white in the darkness.

CHAPTER XX

MID-ATLANTIC

CONNIE HEATH sat across the table from Jimmy Baxter in the Lafayette Restaurant and stared at him dumbfounded. "Sailed!" she said, as though she couldn't believe it.

"That's right. Yesterday. He tried desperately to locate you after the race at Dorchester but you seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth."

"I know," said Connie. "I—I meant to. I didn't want to see Philip just then. I had a bit of thinking to do."

"If I said you were an idiot," said Baxter, "you wouldn't like it. So I won't say it!"

"Thanks!" said Connie dryly. "But please tell me what in the world it means! I simply can't comprehend the fact that he's gone!"

Over the cocktails Baxter told her of Philip's brain wave, the sudden decision to get to England and get it over with. "Both he and Danny believe Bill is as ready as he'll ever be," Baxter explained, "and that the longer they wait the more certain Speed Carey will be to spike the whole thing. I think he's gotten clean away and will be much safer than he would here. Carey can't work in England the way

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he does in New York. He can't transport his thugs there—he won't be able to keep such a close watch on Philip. And you can't blame Philip for wanting to get it over with. After that race at Dorchester—" Baxter shrugged expressively.

"And Carey has no notion where he's gone?"

Baxter frowned and told her of Danny's encounter. "They know the horse has been spirited off somewhere, but I don't think they know where. The only fly in the ointment is Delaney. There's been no sign of him. But I don't think they could have learned the truth in time to get at Philip on the boat."

"You don't *think*—!" said Connie.

"Hey, don't shoot, lady!" Baxter laughed. "Philip radioed me as soon as the ship sailed that everything was okay. I spent most of last night trying to find Delaney and getting some men out to Danny's farm to protect him. This morning I radioed Philip that Carey knew Bill was gone—but that I couldn't tell whether he knew they were on the high seas or not. But I warned him to be on his guard."

"Did he answer that?"

Baxter nodded. "I had a radio from him just before I picked you up for dinner." He pulled the blue form out of his pocket and passed it to Connie. She read, frowning:

EVERYTHING FINE BILL EXPERT SAILOR HAVE YOU SEEN CONNIE PHILIP

"I have a hunch," Baxter said, "that Delaney simply went off on a toot and was ashamed to show up again."

"You don't think he's doublecrossed you?" Connie asked.

Baxter shook his head. "I'd swear that he hasn't. And apparently all's well on the high seas."

They ate for a moment in silence. Connie was still frowning, slightly, as though her thoughts were somewhere else.

"You'll go to England for the race, of course?" Baxter asked.

She nodded. "Neither father nor I could stay away if we wanted to," she said. "We've been waiting for this for about nine years."

Baxter, looking at her troubled face, smiled a crooked little smile. "I've been very studiously minding my own business for days," he said, "but I'm a weak soul and I can't keep it up any longer. I know what's been bothering you, Connie, and much as I'd like to be a snake in the grass and sneak you out from under Philip's nose if I could, I think I ought to tell you that —that—"

"That what?" Connie asked.

"That you're a sucker to worry about Jessica Tarrant," he said, bluntly. "Philip is all tied up in this business—he's been under an awful strain—and he's been worried sick that she got in a jam on his account. But I don't think—"

"Oh, you don't *think!*" said Connie, flushing slightly. She leaned forward. "Jimmy, I'm not thinking about Jessica Tarrant right now. I—I don't like that radio of Philip's."

He looked astonished. "You don't like it? I don't get you?"

"What did you wire him—exactly?"

He grinned and pulled an envelope out of his pocket. "I wrote the message on this. You can read it for yourself." And he handed it to her.

CONNIE read the message scrawled on the envelope:

HOAX IN CONNECTICUT DISCOVERED STOP DELANEY DISAPPEARED STOP DANGER YOUR WHEREABOUTS MAY HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED STOP KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR TROUBLE AND LET ME KNOW IF ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS OCCURS

"Does that seem to cover the situation?" Baxter asked, laughing.

"Yes, it does," said Connie seriously. "But does Philip's radio sound like an answer to that, Jimmy? 'Everything fine Bill expert sailor have you seen Connie.' It was sent hours after he was supposed to have received your wire but it doesn't

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seem like an answer, Jimmy. See what I mean?"

The smile faded from Baxter's face. "You're right. You would think he'd have said something more definite. I was so relieved to hear that he was all right that I didn't think at the time how inadequate this reply was to my message."

"Do you suppose he didn't get it? Your message, I mean."

"Hell, he *had* to get it. I'd have been notified," said Baxter.

The soup the waiter had brought had grown cold in its cups. Connie felt a curious cold chill spread over her body. "Suppose that message was deliberately *not* given to him on shipboard. If Carey had someone on board, he might manage to keep messages from him!"

They stared at each other across the table, eyes wide with sudden alarm. Baxter lit a cigarette, puffed on it nervously.

"What's to be done?" he asked.

"Listen," said Connie. "I've heard that ship owners have a special code which they use when they want to communicate privately with their captains. Couldn't we get the owners of the *Oceanic* to radio the captain and have him give Philip your message over and find out if he got it before?"

"That would do it!" Baxter cried. "But the owners of the *Oceanic* are in London!"

"You've used the Transatlantic phone plenty in the last few days! Let's get busy!"

MIDNIGHT on the high seas. The wireless operator of the *Oceanic* rapped on the door of Captain Travers' cabin and entered when he heard the captain's summons.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," he said, "but a message has just come in from the owners—in code and urgent. I didn't think it could wait till you came on deck."

"Quite right," said the Captain, pulling on his dressing gown. "That will be all, Bently."

The captain went over to the safe in the corner of his cabin and laboriously opened it. From a shelf he took a small black book and went over to his desk. He spread the message out in front of him and began the business of decoding it. When he finished he stared at the transcript for a moment chewing at the ends of his mustache. Then he got dressed.

Captain Travers had to resort to some vigorous knocking on Philip's cabin door before he got any response. Presently it was opened and Philip peered out at him sleepily.

Travers went into the cabin and shut the door. He cleared his throat. "I've just had a message from my owners," he said. "Seems friends of yours communicated with 'em from New York. They seem to think you hadn't received a certain message they sent you."

"I haven't received any message."

Travers scowled. Then he read from the transcript a copy of the message Baxter had sent earlier in the day. "You didn't get that?"

"No, sir, I did not." Philip was reaching for his trousers and there was no longer any sleep in his eyes. "You say that message was sent this morning?"

"Yesterday morning, to be precise," snapped Travers. "It's after midnight now!"

"Captain, if somebody has deliberately kept that message from me and anything goes wrong—"

"I'll soon find out what's going on here!" said Travers. "You'd better come."

"I'm going down to the hold to make certain my horse is all right," said Philip. "If Carey has someone on this boat—"

They went off in different directions, the captain to the wireless room, Philip down the companionway toward the stable hold. Philip was cursing himself. He had decided that old Pat was to be trusted and had permitted himself to sleep in his stateroom where the air was fresher and cooler. He had been certain that everything was safe on the ship—that Carey was unaware of his presence on board.

Before he could reach the hold Philip heard the horses stomping about uneasily.

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Most of them fretted all the time, disturbed by the ship's vibration. There was a single light in the center of the hold, the only illumination at night. Pat, the hostler, slept on a cot that was stretched across the doorway.

PHILIP reached the door, and his heart was suddenly frozen in his chest. The cot was not across the entrance. Pat lay on his back a few feet away, his face scarlet with blood that trickled from a nasty wound on the side of his head.

And then Philip saw the rest. Out in the middle of the floor, in the space where the horses were tied to be cleaned, Philip saw something that turned him sick with fear. Lying on the floor, his legs hobbled, his neck stretched out, was Bill—lying fearfully still. Two figures knelt over him, one a white haired man, one a squat, gorilla-armed Negro. The negro held a flashlight. The light reflected in a glitter something the old man held in his hand.

Something clicked inside Philip's brain —something that turned him for that moment into a raging madman. With a terrible cry he sprang forward. Both the men bending over the horse turned quickly, and something dropped from the old man's shaking fingers to the floor. Philip saw his face for a blurred instant, a twitching, terrified face with a little drool of saliva running from one corner of his mouth.

The Negro, his eyeballs showing white in the eerie light, stood between Philip's charge and the old man. He raised the flashlight he held and brought it downward in a fierce blow. Somehow Philip dodged it and took most of the force of it on his left shoulder—a numbing, paralyzing blow. But he was past the Negro's guard and his fist, carrying all the fury of murder in its force, struck the Negro squarely in the middle of his flat face. The flashlight slipped from the black man's fingers and he staggered back against the wall. He covered up his face and launched a momentary counter attack—and then suddenly his long arms enveloped Philip, pinioned him for an instant. He heard the sound of running feet—the old man flying for safety.

Then Philip and the black man fell to the floor. Philip found his left arm almost useless as the result of the blow on his shoulder. They rolled and writhed on the floor—teeth sank into the flesh of Philip's neck and tore at him as a wild beast might have torn. This black man was far stronger than Philip, yet Philip was fighting with the passion of an almost insane fury.

Back and forth across the floor they rolled, kicking, gouging, slugging. And then suddenly Philip broke free, managed to kick out savagely and caught the Negro squarely in the stomach, driving him back into a corner of the room. Philip dove at him, his fingers sank into the bull-like throat, crushing out life. Black eyes popped in terror—jagged nails tore at Philip's wrists. But before Philip's eyes was a curtain of red rage; he heard no sounds; knew nothing but a lust to kill.

Strong hands were yanking at him now, trying to pull him off his victim. At last they succeeded—pulled him away and to his feet.

It was Captain Travers and one of the mates. As quickly as his fury had come it left Philip—left him weak and trembling. He looked down at the crumpled, unconscious figure of the Negro, unseeing. A terrible fear was wrenching at his heart —a fear that he couldn't understand for a dazed instant. And then he remembered.

He pulled himself away from Travers and turned to the horse, lying so dreadfully still on the floor. He knelt by Bill's head. The gray's eyes were closed. His great body was bathed in sweat, the skin was torn from his legs where the ropes bound them. He had evidently fought hard against the intruders. Instinctively Philip reached out his hand to the horse's muzzle to see if he was still breathing. As he touched the soft nose Bill's lips fumbled feebly at his fingers.

"Bill! Bill! What have they done to you?" Philip cried, in a choking voice.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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The flame danced out at them in little licking tongues

Smoke For Breakfast

By GARVEY MALONE

ROLLING down King street at 6.30 P.M., on his way home from a fire, District Chief Christopher Damon said to his driver:

"Pull in by that truck, Tim."

A truck was discharging bales of waste into the warehouse at Number 686. It was not an hour for honest business in King Street and, in addition, Number 686 was obnoxious to the youthful commander of Fire District Two. The driver growled inwardly as he shifted his foot to the brake. Not half an hour ago, he had been telling Schwartz of Truck 19 that it was a hell of a note.

"I was senior hoseman on Engine 8 when Damon was a probationer. Now I gotta take orders from him. Running with that blond twist of Pat Grady's. Pretty soft for him!"

"Yeah," Schwartz had agreed, placably, "Political pull, sure. Pat would naturally want to take care of him." He was content to be a private and Chris Damon's spectacular advancement worried him less than it did some others. "And you gotta admit, Tim, Chris knows his stuff. And," he added, "he sure is one good guy to work for."

"Sure," Tim conceded sourly, "he's a good fireman. And so is a lot of others as has been at it longer 'n he has."

Which meant, simply, that Chris Damon was expected to marry Norah,

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only child of Patrick (Red Pat) Grady who unobtrusively bossed the political affairs of Levington City. To Chris' uncomplicated soul it had never occurred that there might be a connection between this and the fact that, at thirty-two, he was the youngest district chief the city had ever known. He took his work seriously and he loved Norah Grady; that was all he knew about it.

The gang unloading the truck eyed his approach apprehensively. A plump, oily, somewhat flamboyant individual emerged from the doorway. Chris fingered a loose end in a bale of the waste. Celluloid! He straightened up.

"You got a permit for this stuff, Rathsky?"

An ingratiating smile spread over the bland face. "Oh sure, Chief, I gotta permit. Sure, Chief, you seen my permit."

"For paper and rags," Chris said. "Not for explosives. You got a permit for this celluloid scrap, Rathsky?" he repeated.

He moved toward the door. Rathsky's eyes narrowed and he turned his bulk to block the entrance. Chris thrust him aside. The man gripped his arm.

"It's all fixed, Chief," he said. "Honest, Chief, I got it fixed—all regular." Then, as Chris pressed on, he burst out, viciously: "You got no license bustin' in here, Damon. I got this fixed, see. You mind your own business or," he added, with incisive ugliness, "I'll fix your job, too."

IT WAS true that he had no "license" to enter except in case of fire. It was one of the contributing causes of his discontent. Political influence had transferred the duty of inspection from the fire department to the building department where it operated on the theory that jobs and favors are a fair exchange for votes. Years ago the shopping district had moved uptown leaving King Street in a no-man's land where most of the buildings were unfit even for the storage of paper and rags. Political manipulation of the building ordinances was doing nothing to make it less tough on the firemen.

Inside, the unbroken floor space of the ancient store was jammed with bales of waste and huge bundles of newspapers. They had been packed in without plan. Here and there aimless lanes wandered through the mass, like winding canyons. Instinctively Chris' shoulders hunched; he could picture himself groping through that labyrinth in the smoke of a fire.

Halfway to the rear the freight elevator was starting upward through its grease-soaked shaft of fat pine. It groaned and snapped and shuddered, as though in pain, and the building shuddered with it. Chris turned to the stairs. Rathsky clutched his arm and tried to tug him back. Chris looked down at him and said:

"You lay a hand on me, again, Moe, and I'll wind your nose around your left ear."

He went on up the stairs, the sound of Rathsky's foul abuse following him. The second floor was like the first—filled with bales of paper and rags. At the third floor he brought up short, with a gasp. It was packed to the ceiling with second-hand barrels, a solid mass without a passage anywhere. He wagged his head, miserably, and went on to the top floor. At the elevator, men were unloading the bales of celluloid. Chris snatched a cigarette from the mouth of one of them and ground it under his boot.

"You damn fool," he said, "know what this stuff is?"

The man grunted resentfully. "No."

"Dynamite," Chris told him.

This floor, too, seemed to be filled mainly with paper and rags. The last clear space, around the stairs and elevator, was being filled with the celluloid. Chris had no way of determining how much of it there was and he knew it would be useless to ask. The heat, there under the roof, was stifling and the air reeked with the fumes of hot celluloid.

Rathsky was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs. "I'm tipping the Big Feller on this, see."

"So am I," Chris said. "About those barrels, too."

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"All right, smart guy, all right!" the man railed. "Maybe you ain't so stuck on your job."

"I'm not," Chris told him. "Not with the district plugged full of TNT. How long you leaving that stuff in here?"

The wheedling note came back into Rathsky's voice. "Not very long—only just a few days, Chief. I gotta customer, honest! Maybe we wouldn't have to say nothing to nobody about it, hey? No use makin' trouble about a little thing, hey?"

CHRIS turned away without answering. When he reached his quarters in the house of Engine 8, two blocks up Colony Street around the corner, he found the engine captain stretched out by his window. The latter said:

"Gosh, Chris, hot! You got the coolest room in the house."

"Moe Rathsky just shoved a truck of celluloid scrap into 686 King, fourth floor, by the elevator. Got the third full of barrels must have run 'em in at night."

The captain swore fervently. "The rat! Watcha doin' about it?"

"Putting it up to the big feller." He telephoned Hamlin, the chief of the department and told his story. The big feller made soft, clucking noises.

"That's bad, Chris," he commented. "I'll see the building inspector, tomorrow."

"Eyah," Chris said, "tomorrow. Thermometer's over a hundred, up there, right now. Gas frying out of the stuff and no ventilation."

The big feller seemed, not unreasonably, to resent his tone. "It ain't up to us; it's their funeral."

"Sure, Chief," Chris said, with forced mildness, "but we're the guys will occupy the coffins if that stuff blows."

"Listen, young feller," the chief rasped, "you can't step in here and run this department, see. Your job is to take 'em as they come and put 'em out. If you don't like the job there is plenty others waiting for it. You stick your neck out too far and you'll be working for Harry Hopkins."

Chris hung up. The captain had been watching him with a twisted grin. "No use talkin' to that stuffed shirt, Chris. He plays ball with the gang. That's how he holds his job."

"Eyah," Chris agreed, gloomily. He called the building inspector, at his home.

"Well," that functionary said, with some uncertainty, "of course I wouldn't know, Chris, without looking up the records. I'll see, tomorrow. But Moe Rathsky wouldn't be doing anything that wasn't—uh—all right."

"Would you give him a permit to store explosives in this district, with barrels under 'em?" Chris demanded.

"Well of course I couldn't say, off-hand, Chris. It would depend on—uh—circumstances. Moe wouldn't be keeping it there but a few days, probably."

Chris said, with thin precision: "City ordinance forbids storage of cellulose except limited quantities in cement vaults with special ventilation. Rathsky's got a truckload under that hot roof without ventilation. So what?"

"Look, Damon," the inspector flared back, "you put out your fires and I'll run my own job. Your pull with Pat Grady don't entitle you to run the whole works. Ask Pat and see."

The captain's sour grin had broadened. "So it all adds up to what?" he asked, as Chris swung to face him. Chris told him and his grin faded.

"You can't beat that game, Chris," he said, wagging his head. "If Moe Rathsky was to swing them two wards of his the wrong way, Pat Grady would be sunk. What's a couple tons of celluloid amount to in this district? We got fifty setups that are as bad or worse. Probably one of the others would pop before this one does. A fireman is askin' for it if he tries to buck the politicians. Like the big feller says, Chris, 'Take 'em as they come and put 'em out,'—and let the building department worry."

"If we did the inspecting," Chris retorted, "there wouldn't be any setups."

"Sure," the captain grinned. "And that's why we ain't doin' the inspecting. Them

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setups means votes and money for Red Pat and his bunch. They hires the help and pays the salaries, Chris. Our job is to do what the boss tells us, like any other help—"

"The taxpayers hire us," Chris broke in. "We're not earning our pay if we let these setups stand and say nothing."

"Wait till the politicians put the bee on you, Chris, and see how much your taxpayers do to help you. You're aces with Pat Grady, all right, but that don't mean he'll stand for you shootin' his game."

"Well," Chris said, rising and flexing his big shoulders, "you can run the district your own way till midnight. I've got the evening off."

HE HAD a date to call on Norah Grady. He would have either to face another argument with Red Pat or dodge it, and that would mean to abandon the fight; admit that he was licked. As he changed to mufti, he had a forlorn sense of his own unimportance. He was a pigmy battering futilely against a ring of giants. They tossed him back and went about their affairs, unconscious of his existence.

In spite of the millions which he was reputed to have taken out of Levington politics, Patrick Grady lived in a simple, middle-class house which Norah ran for him with the help of one servant. The sight of her, as she opened the door, stopped Chris' heart, as it always did.

She was very small with wondering brown eyes, a turned-up nose and a skin like rich cream. The carrot-red of Pat's mop was softened to flecks of copper in her brown hair. Pat had spent large sums of money on her but it was his doing, not hers, and there had been no ill effects.

Chris said, "Evenin', Irish," and put his arms around her.

"Evening, tall water-tower." She pressed against him, then leaned away to look up into his face. "You're late. I was beginning to fear me I had another four-bagger to compete with."

"No fire," Chris said, gloomily. He was thinking that, in Norah's simple philosophy, Red Pat Grady could do no wrong. If he broke with Pat, he broke with Norah, too. Her forehead creased.

"Do I rate a kiss?" She inquired. "Or why not?"

He picked her up, like an infant, and as he kissed her his troubles vanished in the flood of his love and his longing. He set her back on her feet and she clung to his arms.

"No," she said, breathlessly. "it's not his love that has cooled. It's something else annoying him. Come tell Norah."

"I've got to talk with Pat, first," he told her.

She stepped back with a stamp of her tiny foot. "No! No brawl tonight. The Grady is in a black mood. I will not have him shedding your blood on my rugs." Suddenly her eyes widened. "So," she said, accusingly. "*You* have shattered the peace of Castle Grady tonight. Every fifteen minutes little Norah toddling to the telephone. Hello, Mr. Rathsky . . . Hello, Mr. Fire Chief . . . Hello, Mr. Building Inspector . . . Hello, Mr. Mayor—and Hon. Pat Grady endangering his arteries and cursing his genial soul into purgatory." There was a note of unhappiness beneath her raillery. "Why are you taking our fair city to pieces, again?"

Chris wished he knew how to explain to her. But he could not explain things—he could only make statements and give orders. But what she had said startled him. The giants, then, were not unconscious of his existence. More than ever he had to talk with Red Pat. Norah shrugged her shoulders and went with him to the lion's den.

It was a comfortable big room, walled with books. Norah had managed to harmonize good taste and her father's primitive ideas of comfort. Pat slouched in a deep chair, his slippered feet on a trestle, reading Synge. Red hair bristled on his bulging arms, overflowed the top of his singlet and formed a sparse horseshoe about his freckled crown. There was no trace of the black mood in his round, good-humored face as he looked over his glasses.

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"Hello, salamander," he said. "Have a chair."

THEY looked expectantly at Norah but she said, in a firm voice: "I'm umpiring this brawl. I proposed to find out what is sticking pins in my peace of mind. . . . Spill it, beautiful."

Red Pat grinned but Chris was desperately uncomfortable. He blurted out his woes as best he could, and Pat listened with an expression of kindly interest. Toward the end, his face clouded.

"I didn't know celluloid was as bad as that, Chris," he commented. "But—well, Rathsky says it won't be in there long. Why not let it ride, this time?"

"Did the building department give him a permit to put it there with barrels under it?"

"No," Pat admitted. "They're as sore about that as you are. But this is a bad time to kick, especially with Moe Rathsky. I'll lay it on the table for you, Chris. The reform bunch is out to give us a battle this fall, and Moe has got the votes to beat us if we rub him the wrong way—"

Chris, in a flare of righteous anger, burst out, "I hope they clean up the whole rotten mess."

Red Pat's chin thrust forward. Norah suddenly sat erect, her cheeks flushed and her eyes snapping. Her father checked her with a quick lift of his hand.

"What's rotten, Chris?" he asked, mildly. "Hose rotten?" Chris shook his head. "You get the best there is," Pat went on. "Your men pass the stiffest tests you can dope out. Isn't a good fireman who'll play ball just as good as a good one who won't? The police are honest. We've got honest pavement, water, sewers. Taxes are low. So's the debt. What's rotten about it?"

"What about the Levington Projects Corporation?" Chris demanded, hotly. "How many millions they make on city contracts?"

"Yes," Norah cried, anger flaming in her face, "and where do the 'millions' go—"

"Norah, hush!" Pat warned.

"I won't hush," she raged. "I won't sit here and let him say such things." She turned to Chris and her voice suddenly became almost forlornly pleading. "He gives it all away, Chris, to help people. If it wasn't for my fighting him he wouldn't have a decent coat to his back."

"Hush, you!" Pat said, more firmly. His mouth twisted, wryly. "Norah, honey," he drawled. "You're sorta spilling the beans. Of course, Chris, the talk is that I'm the Levington Projects Corporation. I've never bothered to deny it, much. I've spent my life giving the city honest administration, it's been my business. What I've taken out of it is no more than fair pay for the work. The Projects Corporation takes the contracts and does an honest job as cheap as it can be done. Would we be any better off with a lot of fly-by-nights underbidding and then skimping the work to scalp a profit?"

CHRIS knew it was wrong, but he did not know how to answer it. Pat Grady smiled faintly at his baffled expression. "Running a city is big business, Chris," he went on, gently. "You can't let a town meeting pick a different bunch of smooth talkers, every two years, and expect to get efficient administration. To prevent that we have to win elections, and that's why we have to play a little ball with the lads who can win them for us. It hurts your conscience but, actually, it don't do any practical harm. These old buildings, now, what's the harm in stretching a little point? Let the owners pick up a few dollars for taxes, give useful guys like Rathsky a cheap place to store their junk, let 'em feel good!"

"They're fire traps," Chris retorted. "Paper and rags are suckers for spontaneous ignition. Any one of them might start a conflagration, any night. They're so rotten they come down on our necks if we go into them with hose."

"How many conflagrations have they ever started?" Pat demanded. "How many firemen have they ever killed? The Fire Department costs a lot of money. It might as well be working as playing pinochle."

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Chris said: "If you let us do the inspecting and licensing, you could disband ten companies, and save the money. We wouldn't need 'em."

"It works better the way it is," Pat said, absently. "We save the money other places." He fell silent, drumming on his knees. "This celluloid mess," he went on, presently, "the newspapers would eat it, right now. Only a week or so, Chris. Suppose we let it ride, this time. It won't happen again. And it wouldn't blow up in that time."

"Maybe not," Chris said, "or maybe it would. If it does it'll smear fire all over that block. We'd be lucky to stop it short of the river."

Pat dismissed that with a shrug. "Swinging a club gets you nowhere, Chris," he said. "Now, you could go to the top of the Fire Department like nobody's business . . . four or five years, maybe. You couldn't get the moon, of course, but working on the inside with me you could accomplish a lot more than you ever will on the outside shooting in."

Abruptly Chris stood up. "You're asking me to tie up with the rotten game, Pat. I won't do it."

Pat shrugged again. Norah had risen, also. She stood so tense that a tendril of hair quivered on her temple. There was both pleading and threat in her eyes. Chris set his jaw.

"Well, why not quit the city game entirely, then?" Pat said. "Plenty of better jobs outside. You've got the stuff. And you'd be off the firing line. Boy," his manner was intensely earnest, "it would be pretty rotten for Norah with her husband and her old man chewing the ears off each other."

Norah said, ominously, "My husband won't be fighting with my father, Pat."

She was looking at Chris and her eyes were flinty; they held no promise. It hurt, but it angered him, too. Meeting her look, squarely, he said:

"I never ducked a fight, yet, Pat."

"Well, think it over, Chris," Pat adjured him.

At the outer door Norah held back from him. "I meant what I said, Chris," she told him, solemnly. "I couldn't marry a man who thinks my father is dishonest. And," she added, with impressive emphasis, "don't think you can beat Red Pat Grady, because nobody ever has."

TRAMPING across town to his quarters, Chris ran into Jim Waldron, city editor of the *Morning Argus*. "Why the furrowed brow, Christopher?" Waldron demanded. "What goes wrong with the sacred Fire Department? Come along and weep into Uncle Jimmie's midnight chow."

He was the closest friend Chris had. Over scrambled eggs and coffee, the latter unburdened himself—"not for publication."

"Pat puts up a good argument, Jim," he said, "but there's a catch in it, somewhere."

"Sure," the city editor agreed. He pondered the matter. "There are, in fact, two catches. Pat is honest and efficient. It would pay the city to hire him, at his own price. But we don't hire him, and that's the first catch. He's a self-appointed dictator and we don't cotton to such, even when honest; we prefer to be free and be robbed. The second catch is that Pat won't live forever and, as soon as his hand is off the throttle, that slick machine of his is going to shoot the works! And may the Lord have mercy on the taxpayers then!

"But Pat is right. You can fight for your principles and get nothing out of it but the sack. Or you can play ball and probably do quite a bit of good on the inside. As a friend I'd advise you to play ball. As a harassed city editor I hope you'll fight. Boy, howdy! what the *Argus* could do with that celluloid story! And we'll give you a job as office boy when your boss ties the can on you. How about it? Can I use it? With your name? You'll be a nine-days hero in the higher circles—and then, *glug-glug*."

"I don't know, Jim," Chris said, unhappily. "Tell you, tomorrow."

He was glad to get back to his quarters,

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within striking distance of that celluloid simmering under the roof of 686 King Street. But it was not the celluloid which prevented him from going to sleep. Was Pat Grady right? Was Jim Waldron right? Was he a fool to stand out for a principle, lose his job, lose Norah and, in the end, accomplish nothing?

Vaguely from the bunkroom upstairs came sounds of snoring and the restless noises of men oppressed by heat. They could sleep; their thinking was done for them. Compromise was so easy; there must be a catch in it, somewhere. If everybody compromised, what became of decency and honesty and principle? He had told Pat Grady he never dodged a fight.

HE HEARD, faintly, the tapper on the apparatus floor strike off a box from the stockyards, far out in the Hampton suburb. Forty acres of sun-baked sheds and pens; a broiling job on a night like this. Five minutes later the tapper clinked a third alarm from the stockyards box.

The house gong thundered and there was the swish and thud of men descending the sliding-poles. He heard Engine 8 roll away to cover in another house. He swung his feet into the boots of his turnouts and sat on the edge of the bed. A fourth alarm tapped in. He rose and drew the waterproof overalls up about his chest, snapping the hooks and shoulderstrap. He crossed to the telephone.

The fire alarm operator said: "Yeah, a honey out there, I guess, Chief. Swell night for a barbecue. Just called Tower Two."

"Water tower at the stockyards?"

The operator laughed. "Cloudburst stuff to cool the back areas. Swell idea."

That left only one water tower and Chris wanted them both to cool that celluloid on the fourth floor if 686 got going. Got going? What kind of a damn fool was he? Why should it get going? The bad risks never burn. Presently Rathsky would truck the stuff out of there and Pat Grady and the others would laugh.

He tramped down to the empty apparatus floor. His driver vacated the watch chair and took seat on the running board of the chief's car. Life's injustice still oppressed him and he had nothing to say. Chris sat down at the desk and resumed his own thoughts. From time to time the telephone reported the drafting of more officers and apparatus to the holocaust. Finally the operator told him:

"All the brass hats are at the barbecue, now, but you and Hamilton. You cover everything south of the line; Hamilton north. Big feller says don't pull any extra alarms if you don't have to. Not much apparatus left and scattered to hell-and-gone."

It was, Chris recognized, a high compliment that he was put in charge of the more dangerous half of the city. He was not afraid of it; he loved it. Chief of Department in five years! He would be thirty-seven—twenty-five, maybe thirty years of command. He lost himself in contemplation of the things he could do.

The tapper began to strike. It was going to be 42, at King and Colony—nuts! Hunches were the bunk—probably 429. But when it had finished it was 42. Mechanically he chalked the number on the blackboard and swung into the car. Rolling the short two blocks, he missed the reassuring clamor of apparatus closing in. There was something ominous in the silence.

Tim, the driver, growled morosely, "Dime takes two-bits it's Moe Rathsky's dump."

It was—with smoke seeping from the first floor and a little from the floor above. The fire, then, was still downstairs. He might get an engine in five minutes and he dared not open the place until it came. He crossed the street and peered up at the roof. No glare of flames above the elevator; no boiling smoke to indicate a heavy mass of fire below. He went through an alley to the rear. The windows were blocked with iron shutters—a major wrecking job to get them open. A siren wailed in the distance and he ran back to the street. The smoke was thickening but it was wood smoke. Fire had not yet taken

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hold of the paper and rags. Not spontaneous—there had been no trace of smoke in the afternoon—probably one of their damned cigarettes. If he could locate the fire he might smear it before it could get a grip and climb.

THE engine company arrived, stretched in and broke down the door. Its first squad disappeared in the smother, dragging their limp line. Chris could not go with them; his place was in the street and he was not used to that. The second squad took a line, over their roof-ladder, into the second floor. Another engine company came and he sent them to the rear door. The first squad reported rags burning but they could not locate it. It was, the messenger indicated, getting damn thick. He was sick in the gutter to prove it. Chris ordered them all to put streams on the elevator shaft and back out at discretion. The combustion of dyed wool might produce almost anything from monoxide to hydrocyanic.

He sent a truck crew, by ladder, to smash the fourth floor windows and wreck the wooden penthouse above the elevator. That would give some vent to the explosive gases which the heat would be distilling from the celluloid. He would not keep men on that deadly lid long enough to cut through the tough roof, itself.

His driver came down from the box. "Fire alarm wants to know what you got here, Chief?"

Chris said, "Pull a third."

The driver surveyed the building, then stared at Chris incredulously. "A third?" he demanded. Appearances might justify a precautionary second alarm but, on the face of it, a third would wreck any man's reputation.

"I said a third," Chris snapped.

The driver shrugged. "Okey, Chief. And what shall I tell 'em?"

"Tell 'em," Chris grated, "we've got poison gas, barrels, and celluloid enough to lift the fire into Church Street. I want Tower One, quick."

The driver shambled off, wagging his head. From then on, Chris lost track of time and detail. He pulled his lines out of the building and set them on tripods in the street to play against the ceilings of first and second floors, spreading water in a shower. He placed lines in the third story windows across the street to play into the fourth floor where the celluloid lay. The windows of the third were blocked by barrels; he could do nothing there.

As apparatus began to arrive on the extra alarms, he placed it in the streets surrounding the block, to connect, stand by and go to work when and where developments might indicate. He told the company commanders what he feared—an explosion which might spread fire over the whole block. They looked at him, dubiously.

When the water tower arrived he set it to sweep the fourth floor to the elevator, using three lines from a third-alarm pumper. He led two more lines to the tower's deck-gun, to cover the second floor. Then he withdrew the lines from the opposite building, setting them back to the corners of the block whence they could close in if the fire crossed King Street.

HE ordered apparatus, ladders and men away from the front of the building and took his stand, alone, behind the water tower, the fixed tripod-lines around him. It was a blind fight, now. With his men under cover there was nothing more he could do but punch water and wait. The driver came down, again, from the box.

"Big feller wants to know ain't you got more stuff 'n you need, here? Says can't you send a couple engines home?"

Eight miles away, the commander had, Chris knew, gauged it correctly by the book. Fire alarm had done well by him—eight engines from a normal response of fourteen. Under ordinary conditions he could, in an emergency, have handled the small building with four. Its side walls were thick. The water-soaked paper would, presently, carry the floors down into a sodden, smouldering mass. His ventilation

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might be carrying off the cellulose gases. Even if fire reached it the stuff might burn in a quick flare and be done. If the explosion came his reserve force would not be enough. But if nothing happened his name would be, eternally, mud. He had given them fair warning—for a full minute he fought it out with himself.

Then he said to the driver, "Pull a fourth. And step on it!"

Tim stood frozen in stupefaction.

It seemed hours before the first of his fourth-alarm engines came. He placed it on the leeward side of the block. Fire alarm was standing by him but the news would have been relayed to the big feller at the stockyards. The latter's reaction came promptly. The driver touched Chris on the arm.

"Look, chief," he said, "Big feller says send this fourth alarm stuff home, pronto. He's sending Morrison down."

Morrison was a deputy chief, Chris' immediate superior. That was a slap in the face. And this was a flat order. To disobey it meant that he was through—through with the department, through with Norah, through with anything he might ever try to do in Levington.

He said, "Tell them I got the order."

Another engine came and he placed it. Then a taxi arrived, bumping over hose lines in defiance of rule. Red Pat Grady heaved his bulk out of it. Chris ordered the driver away and led Pat out of the danger zone. The latter was outwardly unruffled. His face, though, was redder than ever. He shoved forward, glaring.

"What's the idea, Chris?" he demanded. "The big feller phoned me from the stockyards that you'd gone bughouse!"

Chris explained, succinctly, his eyes fixed on the belching structure of 686.

Pat said: "I see. But the big feller was putting out fires before you were born, Chris. He says he may need these engines."

"He'll need 'em worse, here, if that stuff blows."

"That's his funeral, isn't it?" Pat said, mildly. "You can't go over his orders. Let him eat crow; you should worry."

"Eyah," Chris said, dully, "and so will everybody else if she blows up and burns to the river. They'll eat smoke for breakfast. Morrison's coming down."

"I'm glad of that," Pat said, with a breath of relief. "But," he added, "you know you're through."

"Sure," Chris said, "I know. Get back, now, out of the way."

He returned to his post behind the water tower. Another engine dribbled in and he was amazed to get it—a five-man outfit from the southern suburbs. He wondered how long all this had been going on—an hour—it must be more than that—a year. The fire seemed to be gaining—he did not know whether he was sorry or glad.

He saw Morrison coming toward him. The deputy carried his white helmet in his hand. His face was a mask of sweat and soot, pierced by glaring, red-rimmed eyes and the red of raw blisters. There were burned holes in his coat. He walked, stumbling, like a man fagged out. He cleared his throat, angrily, but before he could speak, hell burst in his face.

CHRIS never was able to give a clear impression of what happened then. It was a chaos of noise; an inferno of blasting heat that struck like a giant club; a volcano of flame that towered and spread, hurling fire against the sky. He saw the water tower rise and move toward him. For a flash he thought it was coming over upon him but it settled back upon its wheels, pressing his shoulder, its great streams still boring impassively into the flames. He was being beaten with stunning blows—his head, his shoulders, his body. He clung dizzily to the tower. He saw Morrison go down, a blazing timber across his face. He bent to throw it off but his right arm was dead—gone—he could not feel it. He heaved the timber away with his left and felt flames sear his hand. Blood was streaming hot across his face and he dabbed at it with his sleeve.

He saw men running toward him, blurred, grotesque. In the silence that followed the blast he could hear the roar of

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his pumpers slowly increasing as, one by one, the reserve engines went into action. Firemen picked Morrison up and carried him away. Chris sent his driver to call for another officer and all the apparatus they could raise. After that it was only nightmare of flashes—orders, here and there; wreckage and hoselines that tripped his dragging feet; the dull weight and ache of that dead arm; men holding him erect and pleading with him, meaninglessly; the torment of his battered head.

. . . Then he was lying on a hospital bed, looking up into Red Pat Grady's benign face. He heard Norah's voice, but vaguely. It was all blurred and meaningless and he had to close his eyes again. It might have been right afterward that he heard them again. He opened his eyes. Their faces were real, now—not blurred . . . not nightmare faces.

He whispered. "Did they stop it, Pat?"

Red Pat bent down, grinning. "Sure, you stopped it, fathead."

"Me?" Pat had it wrong. "I wasn't there."

"Weren't you?" said Pat. "I heard different. The big feller says you were there with bells on when he got around. And you were there with engines before it happened."

"Anybody hurt?" It was so weak that he had to repeat to make Pat understand.

"Only you and Morrison," Pat said. "Morrison's retiring. You get his deputy's job."

Chris muttered, "No!" They were trying to make him play ball on the inside. He heard Pat's rumbling chuckle, again:

"He's just back from hell, honey, and this sinful world shocks him. He thinks I'm trying to bribe him again. It wasn't me, Chris. The big feller did it over my dead body. And the aldermen have turned building inspection back to the Fire Department—last night. Is there anything more the corrupt powers can do in the line of eating crow?"

His head began to ache from the effort to understand. But suddenly Norah's lips were against his and that was something he could understand. She laid her cheek against his face and whispered in his ear:

"You've beaten Red Pat Grady, darling. I didn't think it could be done. But," she added, "if you'd let the big mick lick you, Norah Grady wouldn't be kissing you now!"

New Air for Old Bottles

IT'S FUNNY to what lengths the simple problems of daily life will drive the modern scientist. One of the most recent efforts in this direction was the struggle to capture a smell and put it into a bottle.

Can't be done? It has. Who'd want to do it, anyway? Well, of all people, the Pullman company, who were coping with the fresh-air problem in their diners and lounge cars. Small spaces, you know, with numbers of people collected in them, eating, drinking, breathing, and smoking. When the air supplied to a car consists of only 25% fresh air with the rest merely recirculated air the atmosphere becomes pretty unbearable.

So the company's research scientist, H. D. Shaw, aided by V. A. Grant of the University of Illinois, decided to study the smells. To study a smell, it has to be, somehow, put in a bottle.

The recirculated air was passed through dry ice, freezing the moisture and precipitating the air's odors along with it. The frozen odor was put into bottles, the necks of which were fitted with osmoscopes, enabling the scientists to measure the intensity of the odor and the degree of air saturation.

—Boris Vronsky

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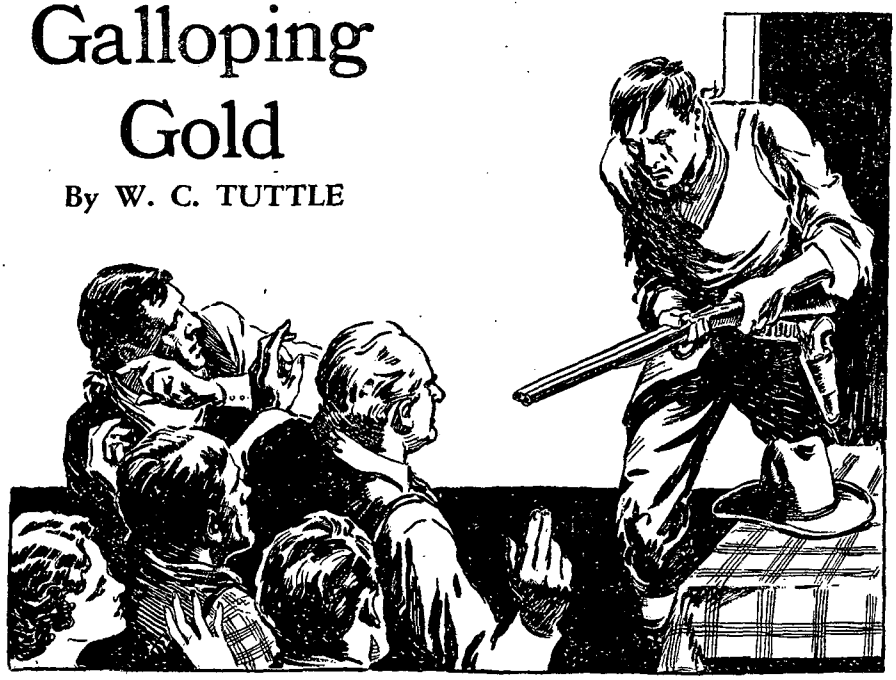
Galloping Gold

By W. C. TUTTLE



THE trouble in Wild Horse Valley began further back than the killing of the irascible Ab Morgan, owner of the Quarter-Circle M, supposedly by Roarin' Bill Rose, in the general store in Tonto City. Ever since Roarin' Bill, a reformed outlaw, had taken over the adjoining Lazy R some years before, Morgan and his hard-bitten cowboys had been causing Rose trouble—fencing his waterhole, stealing his cattle, doing everything possible to drive him out. They have just about succeeded—but just before the shooting, Roarin' Bill got even in a way he hadn't expected. Having hidden out his four old owlhoot friends—Pecos Charley Peters, Sody Slade, Ed Clovis and Zibe Tucker—in the old Comanche mine on Morgan's land, he is about to be repaid for his kindness. The four men have discovered a rich vein of gold in the old mine! They have promptly set to work to cart the gold over and hide it in the old Two-Gun mine on Lazy R land. They have just finished the job, and Bill has taken in a sample of the gold to the assayer, when the shooting occurs.

Sheriff Henry Harrison Conroy, that amazing ex-vaudevillian, does not succeed in finding the supposed killer of Ab Morgan, however. Instead, he finds where Roarin' Bill's horse has gone over the edge of Devil's Chimney. Since nobody could outlive such a fall, and since it is virtually impossible to get down the Chimney to investigate, that seems to finish the matter.

DOWN in nearby Scorpion Bend, though, it is only the beginning. Ira Hallam, Tonto City assayer, has rushed over immediately to tell his friend Sam Hartridge, crooked Scorpion Bend lawyer, of the rich gold sample Roarin' Bill brought to town with him—supposedly from Bill's old Two-Gun mine.

When they learn of Roarin' Bill's supposed death, the two figure out a scheme to get the gold. Bill has left his will with Hartridge, in which he gave all his worldly goods to a nephew in Detroit whom he has never seen. They decide to produce a substitute for the nephew.

Hallam gets hold of "Slim," a drifter from out East who is interested in mining. They proposition him. He agrees to pose as the

This serial began in the Argosy for May 8

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nephew if they'll split three ways on the take. They grudgingly agree.

"So your name from now on," says Lawyer Hartridge, "is Frank Neilan—from Detroit."

"Frank Neilan," mutters Slim. "Why—uh—that's fine. I won't forget that name. . . ."

The supposed Neilan takes over the Lazy R, finds his employees to consist of those amazing Mexicans, Thunder and Lightning Mendoza. But he hasn't been there long before the four outlaws get wise to the fact that he's pulling a phony with Hartridge. So they corner him at the ranch house, tell him he'll have to go in with them on the gold proposition. This Frank Neilan, who seems to be a very tender tenderfoot, agrees to do.

Frank also finds himself with enemies at the Quarter-Circle M. Having met pretty Sally Morgan, Ab's stepdaughter who now owns the ranch, on his first day in town, and both having decided not to continue the ancestral enmity, Frank calls on Sally. Cal Essex, Lazy R foreman, doesn't like this friendliness. The result is a battle of fists, in which Frank acquits himself remarkably well for a tenderfoot, scoring, in fact, a knockout.

AFTER that Essex decides to pay a call upon the Lazy R, with five masked cowboys, and run Neilan out of the country. He runs into difficulties, however, because Neilan's four outlaw "hands" are ready for him. The only ones who get the worst of this encounter are Sheriff Henry and Lawyer Hartridge, who have each picked this time to do a little spying, and end up fighting each other in the dark with fists.

In the resultant confusion, Cal Essex and his masked riders get away into the darkness, unidentified.

Essex now takes another tack. He corners the Mendoza brothers, at the point of a gun demands to know who Neilan's four new punchers are.

"Murderers!" says Lightning. "They keel mos' everybodee een New Mejico."

"Fine," says Essex. "And if you tell anybody yuh told me this, I'll cut off your ears."

The two Mexicans are very terrified at this threat.

"We cross my heart and hope you die," says Lightning fervently.

CHAPTER X

THE TWO-GUN GHOST

IT WAS siesta time in Tonto City, several days after the incident at the Lazy R, and everyone seemed to be enjoying it. Henry was asleep in his chair, feet on the table top. Judge, tilted against the wall, snored gently, his sombrero tilted over his eyes, while Oscar Johnson, stretched flat on the office cot, snored sonorously.

At the Tonto City Bank, George Reed, the cashier, yawned and looked at the big clock on the east wall of the bank. It showed five minutes until three o'clock—closing time. Further back in the room, Don Martin, the elderly bookkeeper, labored over his ledger.

There was rarely a customer in the bank at that time. In fact, there was little business in the afternoon, especially when the weather was as hot as it was this day. Reed turned and walked back to Martin, who glanced up from his work.

"Just about time to close the doors," the cashier said.

Martin glanced at the clock, nodded. Then his eyes shifted to the front doorway, and his mouth dropped open. Reed whirled when he saw the expression on Martin's face.

Three masked men were filing in, their guns trained on the two employees of the bank. Out in front another masked man sat on his horse, holding the tie-ropes on three other saddled horses. Reed saw all this in a glance; and he heard the leader of the trio say:

"No foolin' now—shell out the money. We're in a hurry, and unless yuh want hell to break loose—"

While Reed stood stockstill, one of the men stepped over the railing. He scooped all the loose money from the cashier's shelves.

"Get that safe open—we want real money!" snapped the spokesman.

"It's open," replied Reed. "If—"

"Back up ahead of me. You'll—"

From out in the street came the report

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of a shot. The man on the horse had fired that shot at Tom Rickey, proprietor of the hotel, who had just stepped outside. Rickey dived for cover. The bandit turned then and sent a bullet toward the doorway of the Tonto Saloon. Several men who had stuck their heads out ducked back.

"C'mon!" snapped the spokesman of the hold-ups. "Hell will break loose pretty quick."

The three men started for the doorway. As they did so, Reed drew a gun from inside his coat. He didn't get to use it, though. One of the bandits, apparently expecting such a move, whirled and fired. Reed sprawled across a desk, shot through the heart.

The three ran out then, mounted their milling horses. Throwing a volley of shots toward the saloon and hotel, they galloped out of town.

In about three minutes they had entered the bank, taken less than two hundred dollars, killed George Reed, and were gone.

HENRY, Judge and Oscar awoke at the first shot, and were out on the street as the bandits departed, wondering what it was all about. They soon found out. George Reed had been instantly killed, and Martin was so shaken that he could hardly tell what had happened. They closed the bank and removed the body. Luckily George Reed was a single man.

After the coroner had gone, Tom Rickey came to Henry.

"They almost got me," he said nervously. "Didn't miss me an inch."

"Did you get a good look at them, Tom?"

"All masked in black, Henry. With all the confusion it's impossible to describe them singly—but I know those horses."

"You do?"

"Yes. There was a blue roan, a sorrel with four white stockings, a sorrel with white markings on its rump, and a tall black, with a blaze face. All four of those horses belong to the Lazy R outfit."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Are you sure of that, Tom?"

"I should be; I sold all of them to Roarin' Bill Rose about a year ago. If you remember, I collected four horses on a debt."

"Yes, yes, I remember that. Lazy R, eh? Hm-m-m. Well!"

Henry hurried back to the office, where he discussed it with Judge.

"Oscar said that the four new men up there were tough looking," reminded Judge. "They took a chance that the horses would not be recognized. What fools! Getting less than two hundred dollars—and killing a decent citizen. Hanging is too good for them."

Henry did not seem very enthusiastic.

"We can't go above the law, Judge," he said. "Hm-m-m. Four bad men. Well, it stands to reason that our force is not adequate to go to the Lazy R and make an arrest. At our age, no one could say that we filled an untimely grave; but I am thinking of Oscar."

Judge snorted. "I am thinking just like you are, Henry—and we are both liars. How would it be if I sent out to the Morgan ranch and secured several of their cowboys? We could add Danny Regan and Frijole Bill Cullison, if he should be sober. Say about six from the Morgan crew, with Danny and Frijole, Oscar Johnson, and us—that would make eleven men."

"Eight men," corrected Henry. "You can't count on Frijole—and there are you and me. Number, yes; men, decidedly not. But by all means, send a message to Miss Sally Morgan, asking the loan of six men. You might tell her, of course, what we wish to do with them, and that we do not agree to send them back in first-class condition. They might even come back in very bad order."

"Any special men you'd like to have, Henry?"

"Oh, no. She will likely send Cal Essex in charge of them. I am a bit curious to find out if he is as brave as he sounds."

IT WAS nearly sundown when Frank Neilan, alone in his ranch house, tossed aside an old magazine, yawned

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widely and got to his feet. He walked over to a front window and glanced out—just as Sally Morgan rode swiftly up to the front of the house and dismounted. With a gasp of surprise Frank Neilan flung open the door. Sally was hurrying up the steps, panting a little, and he followed her into the house.

"Why, Miss Morgan, this is a—" he began.

"Wait!" she interrupted. "Where are your men?"

"My men? Why, I'm sure I—"

"They're not here?"

"No. I expect them home at any time. But I don't see—"

Swiftly she told him what had happened in Tonto City that afternoon. She told him that the horses had been identified as belonging to the Lazy R, and that the sheriff had sent for her men to make up a posse.

"They're on their way to Tonto City now," she told him. "It won't take them long to come back here."

"Why—why, it's unbelievable!" he said huskily. "It's—"

Frank Neilan hesitated. Was it incredible? He remembered that Pecos Charley Peters had said, "Well, we know how to get money, when we need some." Could it be possible that this was how he meant?

"What do you *know* about those men?" asked Sally.

"Nothing," he replied miserably. "But why did you come here to warn them, if you felt that they were guilty?"

"I didn't come to warn them—I came to warn you. I didn't think you had anything to do with it. But when that posse comes, there will be a fight, if your men are here. Anything might happen, you see."

"Very nice," drawled a voice from the doorway. They turned to face Cal Essex. He stood there, covering Neilan with his gun.

"It was shore nice of the lady," sneered Essex, moving closer. "It will sound fine to Wild Horse Valley when I tell 'em that Sally Morgan sent her crew to help the sheriff capture four murderers, and then she went to warn the murderers herself."

"Where did you come from?" asked Sally.

"Me? Oh, I didn't go to Tonto. I sent the boys to join up with the sheriff, while I watched this place. I was goin' to join them when they got here. Good thing I did, too. How do you feel about it, Neilan?"

"Sort of numb," replied Neilan soberly.

Essex laughed nastily. "You was born thataway. I'll just hold you two here until the posse gets here. Mebbe the sheriff will want to know why yuh came to warn a murderer. As for you, Neilan—make one move to change the situation and I'll drill you full of holes. In fact, I'd like to have yuh make a break."

"I never carry a gun," repied Neilan. "But you're wrong about Miss Morgan coming to warn a murderer."

"Oh, I see—just a social call, eh? Well, it may mean a rope around your neck, feller. And it'll mean that Wild Horse Valley won't have much use for Sally Morgan."

"I wonder what will happen if my men get here ahead of the posse," remarked Neilan. "It would be interesting. If I thought—"

Just then he looked past Essex to the doorway, and his eyes opened wide. For a moment Essex forgot himself. He turned swiftly, and his gun hand jerked shoulder high.

At that moment Neilan sprang. His right hand grabbed Essex' wrist. With a quick jerk back, he twisted the gun away from the foreman, and as Essex turned he swung his left fist in a ripping uppercut that caught Essex under the chin. Essex went down, striking his head solidly on the floor.

Sally was leaning back against a table, breathing heavily, and Neilan had stepped back, was looking down at his fallen adversary, when a new voice spoke.

"I do not believe there is any use counting," said Henry Harrison Conroy. He stood in the doorway, calmly surveying the scene. "When they are hit in that manner, I do not believe a count is necessary."

"Mr. Conroy!" gasped Sally. "Where on earth did you come from?"

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"Oh, here and there," smiled Henry. "As a matter of fact, I thought I would come ahead and look things over. Lovely afternoon, isn't it? Miss Morgan, I heard what Mr. Essex said. If I were you I would go home, before anyone else arrives. In that way, Mr. Essex would have difficulty in proving anything, especially when Mr. Neilan and I are willing to testify that he is a liar."

"Please go," added Neilan. "And don't forget that I'm very grateful for what you've done. It was mighty kind of you."

AT FIRST Sally hesitated; but she realized they were right. She went back to her horse, mounted and rode swiftly away.

"A wonderful woman," commented Henry. "Most wonderful, sir."

"In all the world," added Neilan.

Henry shot a sharp glance at the young man, then as quickly turned his attention to Cal Essex. The foreman was struggling to sit up. In a few moments he was able to shake the cobwebs from his brain and look around. He looked curiously at Henry, blinking rapidly.

"I hope you are sane again, Mr. Essex," said Henry.

"Sane? What do yuh mean?"

"You most certainly haven't been showing much sanity. By any remote chance, have you been smoking marijuana?"

"What do yuh mean?" growled Essex huskily.

"Mistaking me for a lady," smiled Henry. "Calling me Sally Morgan. Accusing me of coming here to warn a murderer. I hope that punch in the jaw I gave you has restored your sanity, sir."

"The—the punch *you* gave me? Why, you—you—" Essex struggled for words to express himself.

"Off again," sighed Henry. "Sad case. Must consult a doctor at once."

"Of all the damn fools!" choked Essex, blazing with wrath.

"I am afraid," said Henry, "that the responsibility of running a big cattle outfit has affected his mind, Mr. Neilan. I was told that he was acting in a peculiar manner several days ago. Visions of grandeur, and all that, if you know what I mean."

"I believe I do, Mr. Conroy," nodded Neilan soberly.

"You lyin', bat-eared, bug-headed sapsuckers!" howled Essex. He felt for his gun, but it was in Neilan's hand.

"Signs of violence," said Henry. "I suppose I shall have to take him to a doctor—a brain specialist, if we can locate one. Perhaps we had better—"

Essex started backing toward the doorway.

"You keep away from me!" he snapped. "Damn you and yore doctors! I'm as sane as you are. You try to touch me and I'll—"

He backed off the threshold, nearly fell down, and ran to his horse. He mounted it on the run, and went spurring away.

Henry and Neilan watched him from the doorway, and then looked at each other queerly.

"You're a genius, Sheriff," declared Neilan.

"I believe we have stilled the tongue of scandal, sir," replied Henry. "Now—where are your four cowboys, Neilan?"

"I haven't any idea, Mr. Conroy. Miss Morgan told me what happened in Tonto City. It was a terrible thing."

"The horses they rode belong to this ranch."

"That's what Miss Morgan said."

"Hm-m-m."

Henry leaned against the doorway and rubbed his nose.

"What are their names, Neilan?"

Neilan told him their names, and added that they were from Black River City. Henry wrote the names in his notebook.

"They rode over the hills from Black River Flats," he said.

"Presumably untrue," remarked Henry. "Few people know the trail, it is mighty dangerous, and ends long before reaching this valley."

"I believe they were in Black River Flats quite a while," offered Neilan.

"Punching cows?"

"Why, yes."

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"That is queer. There isn't a cow in all that country, Neilan. Nothing but sheep."

"Here comes the posse," said Neilan thankfully. He was getting in over his head, trying to alibi the four outlaws.

THERE were five men from the Quarter-Circle M, and Oscar, Judge and Danny Regan. Frijole had just opened a new batch of prune whisky and was in no shape to ride. They approached carefully, until they saw Henry and Neilan.

"They flew the coop, eh?" queried Danny.

"I haven't determined," replied Henry. "Mr. Neilan says they haven't been here since this morning."

"Where's Essex?" asked Steve McClung.

"He left here a few minutes ago," replied Henry soberly. "What on earth is wrong with him? He mistook me for Miss Morgan, talked like a crazy man, threatening us with a revolver. I am worried about him."

"Why, I—I didn't notice anything," faltered McClung. "Yuh say he mistook yuh for Miss Morgan, Sheriff?"

"Wasn't that ridiculous?" queried Henry. "I'm afraid the man has lost his mind."

"He certainly isn't normal," agreed Neilan. "In fact, I would say he is decidedly crazy."

"I'll be danged!" whispered McClung. "That's funny."

"Decidedly," added Henry. "Well, I do not suppose there is any use of staying here longer. If they are guilty, I am very much afraid you will never see your crew again, Mr. Neilan. Sorry to have bothered you, and I wish you a very good evening, sir."

"It was a pleasure," replied Neilan.

"I suppose you boys from the Morgan ranch may as well go home for the night. Thank you for coming; and will you please convey my thanks to Miss Morgan for allowing you to come. It was kind of her. Good night."

"Henry," said Judge, as, moments later, the four of them rode back toward Tonto City, "what sort of skulduggery are you concocting, anyway? Will you tell me?"

Henry looked injured. "My dear Judge! Skulduggery?"

"A robbery and a murder, sir! Circumstantial evidence points to the four men on the Lazy R, and you dismiss your posse. No wonder they call us the Shame of Arizona, sir! It— it smells!"

"You should mention smells to a man with a nose like mine."

"Free-holey brought in yug of prune yuice," said Oscar. "Yeeminee, das vars good liquor. Ay took von drink, turned my hurse loose, and sporred ha'al out of de hitch-rack."

"Officers of the law," sighed Judge. "No wonder the finger of scorn is pointed at us. It irks me sore, Henry."

"Try baking-soda in warm water," advised Henry.

SAM HARTRIDGE and Ira Hallam were awaiting the sheriff in Tonto City. That unscrupulous pair had heard about the suspicions against the Lazy R, and were anxious to hear what the posse had accomplished. They hung around, asking questions, until well after dark. Then they drove out of town, circled back and headed for the Lazy R. Hartridge did not want to go, but Hallam was insistent.

"I want to see that vein of ore," declared Hallam. "I'm taking long chances on being a party to a deception, and I want to see if the game is worth the candle."

"Maybe the ore never came from the tunnel," said Hartridge. "Maybe he found it on the ground somewhere."

"No, he didn't. That sample came from a depth, I tell you. We're going into that Two-Gun tunnel and take a look around."

They tied the buggy horse off the road and went stumbling across the hills in the darkness. Both men carried a candle. Hartridge complained all the way. "A fine job for a lawyer!" he grumbled. "Breaking my shins on boulders and ripping my legs to shreds on Spanish bayonet."

"Yes, and you're a hell of a lawyer," panted Hallam. "Don't know the difference between *corpus delicti* and *e pluribus*

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unum. A credit to the profession . . . "

Hallam knew the exact location of the tunnel. There were about two hundred feet of tunnel, which opened into a stope. From there another tunnel angled to the left. About fifty feet back of this tunnel was where the cave-in had been made by the four outlaws.

Hartridge and Hallam climbed up on the old dump and went to the portal, where they lighted their candles.

"I feel like a burglar," whispered Hartridge.

"Well, you're not far from it," growled Hallam. "Come on."

Their feet made dull, booming noises, as they went slowly along. The candles flickered. The air was cool and dank. Hartridge shivered audibly.

"Like a grave," he muttered.

"Tomb," corrected Hallam.

"They're alike," growled Hartridge. "Smelly place, anyhow."

"Nice place for a murder, Sam."

"That's a pleasant thought."

They came into the stope, which was about twenty-five feet across, fifteen feet high at the dome, the floor a mass of broken rock. Hartridge, who had been behind, moved in beside Hallam. They lifted their candles high, surveying the place.

Suddenly they froze. Hartridge dropped his candle, grasping Hallam with both hands. Hallam whirled, accidentally knocking the candle out of his own hand, plunging the place into darkness.

Luckily they hit that tunnel dead center. It was hardly wide enough for a race, but it served nicely. Halfway to the portal of the tunnel, Hallam went down, but he bounced to his feet and kept on galloping.

Hartridge probably beat Hallam to the portal by twenty feet, but in the open country Hallam was the better at cross-country running. In fact, Hallam went so fast that he went past the horse and buggy, and had to come back; while Hartridge, almost in a state of collapse, got there in a dead heat with Hallam.

There were no questions asked. They tore the tie-rope loose, piled into that buggy and headed for Tonto City, with the horse at a gallop. Two miles from the spot where they had driven, Hallam said:

"Good Lord, Sam! Did you see what I saw?"

"If I—I didn't," countered Hartridge, "what do you suppose I ran for—to catch you?"

"Standing there—staring!" said Hallam. "Looking right at us, as though accusing us. Dead as hell—all but his eyes!"

"Good gosh!" exclaimed Hartridge. "We—we must be crazy, Ira. There are no ghosts. It's absurd, I tell you."

"Certainly," agreed Hallam. "I—I mean—there haven't been any—until tonight. I was afraid my heart would go bad on me, Sam."

"Well, we both saw it, Ira."

"Plain as the nose on—er—Henry Conroy's face. Should we stop in Tonto City and tell 'em about it?"

"Hell—no! They'd say we are crazy. We will just forget it."

"I guess that will be best. I—I wonder if it was our imagination?"

"Would two people imagine the same thing at the same time?"

"I don't know. I'm still as weak as though I had been sick for a week. Things like that are hard on a person—don't you know it?"

"That's a devil of a question to ask!" replied Hallam. "We will just drive straight through Tonto City, Sam; I want to get home."

"It's foolish," declared Hartridge. "Roarin' Bill Rose is dead—*but there was something that looked like him, Ira.*"

"Of course, he's dead. It—it just looked like Roarin' Bill—that's all."

"That's enough, isn't it?" whined Hartridge.

CHAPTER XI

EMPTY HOLSTER

DAN LEARY stood in the main room of the Morgan ranch house, hat in hand, rather apologetic in manner, as he faced Sally Morgan.

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"We ain't said nothin' to Cal Essex," informed Dan. "He's down in the bunkhouse, a-settin' on a bunk, actin' kinda dumpish. Yuh see, it was over at the Lazy R t'day, ma'am. We got there, findin' only Neilan and the sheriff. The sheriff said that Essex had gone crazy, mistook him for you, and—well, he said Essex—"

"Mistook the sheriff for me?" gasped Sally.

"That's right, ma'am. He said that Essex mistook him for you, and said he was goin' to tell that you went to warn a murderer. Essex wasn't there when we got there. They said he went out of there, heckity-blip. I dunno . . ."

Sally's mind was working swiftly. Cal Essex had been unconscious when she left. The sheriff, wanting to spare her, had managed to convince Essex that he had lost his mind, and mistook him for Sally Morgan.

"We don't know what t' do, ma'am," said Dan. "Yuh can't tell nothin' about a crazy feller. We don't know whether to hop onto him and tie him, or jist humor him."

Sally turned away, gritting her teeth to prevent laughter. Finally she turned, her eyes wet with tears of mirth—which Dan mistook for the opposite emotion.

"I—I would humor him," said Sally huskily. "Please go, Dan."

"I know jist how yuh feel, Miss Morgan," said Dan. "It's shore tough."

IN Tonto City next morning, Judge was still saying: "The question is, are you going out to the Lazy R and arrest those four strangers, Henry? Or are you going to stay here and polish a chair, adding to the shame of this already shameless office."

"Yes—and no," replied Henry. "I am thinking, Judge."

Judge sat down in his accustomed chair and tilted back against the wall. From this stance he looked balefully upon Henry Harrison Conroy.

"I expect they will impeach us—soon," said Judge.

"At least, it will be a diversion," murmured Henry.

"By the way," said Judge, "I was talking with a bartender from Scorpion Bend today. He asked he if I knew anything about the new strike Roarin' Bill had made on his ranch."

"Strike?" Henry lifted his head and squinted at Judge.

"Gold, I believe. The man said that Roarin' Bill had been in his saloon shortly before the tragedy, and imbibed freely. During this period of part-inebriation, Roarin' Bill intimated that he had brought in a sample of very rich gold ore for analysis and—"

"My goodness!" interrupted Henry. "Why, that is fine, Judge!"

"Are you trying to be funny, sir?" demanded Judge.

"You may cite me for contempt of valuable news, Judge, if I am. It is welcome information. Proceed."

"Well, that was about all. The man did not see the sample."

"An analysis would mean an assay, I presume, Judge."

"If you are interested—yes."

"As Danny Regan would say, 'I hope to tell yuh'," said Henry. "I am beginning to see a thin spot in the fog. Hm-m-m. And Mr. Hallam is an assayer, I believe."

"The only one in Scorpion Bend, Henry. Why—" Judge broke off short, stared at Henry for a moment, looked away and closed one eye. When Judge closed one eye, he was thinking deeply.

"Rich gold strike on the Lazy R—Hallam an assayer—and Hartridge contacted the heir . . ."

"Exactly," remarked Henry dryly. "It might put a value on the Lazy R far above the land and few livestock."

"I believe I have discovered something!" exclaimed Judge.

"Again, I hope to tell yuh, Judge. But where do the four men come in?"

"Merely incidental, I suppose—except for robbing banks and murdering folks."

"Merely inconsequential, Judge. What is robbery and murder!"

"I did not mean that, sir. What is our best move?"

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"Tonight," replied Henry, "you and Oscar and I will go to the Lazy R. Unless I am mistaken, those four strangers are living in that old mine. We might leave fairly early, so as to have a little daylight in which to look over the situation. I do not believe they would chance living at the ranch house now. And with a modicum of luck, we might make a capture."

"And without said modicum of luck, we might get shot, Henry."

"Who knows their modicum until it has been tested, Judge?"

LATE that afternoon they rode out of town. They proceeded to a spot about a mile from the Lazy R ranch house, where they left the horses. With Henry in the lead, they shoved and stumbled their way through the brush to a point just across a small ravine from the old Two-Gun mine. They went into hiding to watch the place. There was no sign of life.

Darkness comes swiftly after sundown in the desert hills. They went at last quietly across the ravine and climbed through the brush near the portal of the tunnel.

As Henry climbed up to the dump level, he hunched down quickly, speaking a warning to the others. They drew back down into the brush.

"Four men coming," whispered Henry. "Our quarry, I think."

The four men came quietly to the portal, where they stopped. The light was very poor, but Cal Essex' voice was clear to the three officers, although he was speaking quietly.

"We know they ain't at the ranch house," he said. "This is the best bet. We can't all go in; so I'll go alone. I've got to go danged easy and not show a light; so don't get nervous. If they're in there, we'll get 'em cold, even if we have to cave this old tunnel in on 'em."

As Cal Essex disappeared into the tunnel the remaining three men hunched down. There was not a sound for sometime then except the calling of a mocking-bird. After about five minutes a coyote, far back in the hills, began his evening chattering howl.

Just then Henry pricked up his ears. In the air was a muffled drumming sound. Sort of a *thum-m-m, thum-m-m, thum-m-m,* growing louder.

Suddenly the three men up by the mouth sprang to their feet. Out of the tunnel shot Cal Essex, running at top speed. Nor did he stop. Ignoring the other three men, he swung left, a strangled yelp in his throat, and kept right on going.

After a moment of indecision, the other three took after him.

"Yumpin' Yudas!" exclaimed Oscar. "He ran like ha'al!"

"They all did," marveled Judge.

Henry climbed up to the portal of the tunnel, but it was too dark to see the disappearing cowboys from the Quarter- Circle M. Judge and Oscar joined him.

"I will just be damned!" blurted Henry weakly.

As they stood there the moon peeped over the hills, bathing the world in silver and blue.

"Pretty light here," muttered Judge. "If they should come back, we would make mighty fine targets."

"They did not seem to have a return ticket, Judge," said Henry.

"Yudas!" choked Oscar, his voice pitched nearly to High-C.

Judge and Henry turned. Standing full in the moonlight, bareheaded, clad in a hazy gray, stood Roarin' Bill Rose. There was no question of identity, because his face was full in the moonlight. There was not a quiver to his ghostly apparition.

"Good Lord!" gasped Henry, and stepped back—off the edge of the dump.

End over end he went to the bottom of the dump, landing finally in the brush, without breath enough in his lungs to blow the dust out of his nose. Judge and Oscar did not stand upon the order of going—they merely went.

It was possibly ten minutes before Henry was able to get his head higher than his feet, after which he managed to stand up. Satisfied that no bones were broken, he clawed his way not too enthusiastically to the top of the dump, where he peered over

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toward the portal. But there was nothing in sight now, except the yawning, black mouth of the tunnel.

Henry slid back down the dump, and went ripping his way through the brush, back toward the horses.

He found Judge and Oscar waiting for him, with the horses untied.

"Where did you go, Henry?" asked Judge huskily. "When we looked around, it was as though the ground had swallowed you."

"I went backwards off that damnable dump."

"Do you suppose das prune yuice act like that, Hanry?" queried Oscar painfully.

"It might be the right solution, Oscar."

"Ay saw Roarin' Bill yust as plain. Yumpin' Yudas, das is first ghost Ay ever seen, and Ay hope it is de last vun."

"Amen," sighed Judge. "I guess I am getting old, Henry. I didn't do that last mile in less than a minute. I wonder if Cal Essex saw it, too."

"I only know what I saw," replied Henry. "It was gone, when I went back."

"You went back?" gasped Judge.

"Looking for you two," explained Henry. "It must have been a mirage. We both know that ghosts do not exist, Judge. It isn't scientific."

"Science be damned! I've got eyes."

"And very good legs for a man of your age, Judge. Suppose we go home. At last I am tired enough to enjoy riding a horse."

"Yudge can run like ha'al," declared Oscar. "Ay couldn't catch him, Hanry—and Ay vars yust as scared as he vars."

"Well," sighed Henry, as he hoisted his bulk into the saddle, "it is a phenomenon that is difficult to explain. Suppose we keep it to ourselves. No use having people laugh at us. We could not prove it, you must remember. They'll say—prune juice."

"I wish we had some, Henry; I feel the need of somthing."

"Ay have got quart inside my slicker roll," said Oscar.

"Thy name is Blessed, you wonderful Swede!" exclaimed Judge.

"My name is Oscar Yohnson, and Ay—Yeeminy! Das curk vorked out and de whole vest end of my hurse is prune yuice!"

"You negligent, half-witted, Vitrified Viking!" choked Judge. "You—it's all gone, Oscar?"

"Except de smell, Yudge."

"Probably paralyze the hind legs of the quadruped," said Henry.

"Let's go home, gentlemen. One evening like this is enough."

SO SWIFT of foot was Cal Essex that his three companions were outdistanced. They reached their horses, but Cal Essex was not there. Nor had he taken his horse.

"What the heck ailed him, anyway?" wondered Dan Leary. "My gosh, I never seen a man run that fast."

"Do yuh want to go back and see what it was?" asked McClung.

"I do not. We'll wait till Cal shows up. It might be that he's had a fall. This is mighty rough country for foot-racin'."

As a matter of fact, Cal Essex had had several falls, and his mind was altogether in a very bad condition, when he looked up from his one-man race to discover himself near the Lazy R ranch house. In his muddled condition he conceived an idea that Frank Neilan was at the bottom of his troubles; so he stumbled up to the front door of the ranch house, kicked it open and stepped into the main room.

Frank Neilan was standing at a table, trying to teach Lightning and Thunder the intricacies of seven-up, when Essex crashed in. Essex was hatless, his shirt torn, face bleeding from scratches. He stopped ten feet from Neilan, hunched forward, his lips drawn back in a snarl, an insane glitter in his eyes.

"You think you'll get her, do yuh?" he rasped. "You do, eh? Well, yuh won't, damn yuh, Neilan. I've come to kill you—now!"

His right hand, spread claw-like, flashed to his holster. For a moment Frank Neilan's heart stood still. He realized that he

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was nearer death than he had ever been in his life.

But the killer did not draw. The expression of bitter hate turned to one of blank amazement. His holster was empty!

Somewhere in his wild dash from the old tunnel he had lost his gun. Slowly his empty hand came away. He looked at it dumbly. Then he licked his lips, his eyes blinking slowly, as he backed away to the doorway. With a queer, strangled oath, he disappeared in the darkness.

Frank Neilan drew a deep breath. The two Mexicans were staring at the empty doorway.

"*Madre de Dios!*" whispered Lightning. "He say he's goin' keel you, and then he don't pull hees gon!"

"I'm theenk hees liar," remarked Thunder.

Neilan rubbed a hand across his eyes, shrugged his shoulders and went to close the door. He dropped the bar into place and came back to the table.

"I'm theenk thees man ees crazee," said Lightning.

"Crazy?" queried Neilan. "By jove, I wonder if Henry Conroy was right, after all! I wonder if he meant that I wanted Sally Morgan."

"Don't you?" asked Lightning.

Neilan was suddenly thoughtful. "Maybe I do," he said.

"Eef you don'," remarked Lightning, as he shuffled the cards, "you are jus' as crazy as Cal Essex."

CHAPTER XII

THE GHOST WALKS AGAIN

IT was the day after the ghost-hunt. Henry was sitting comfortably in Sam Hartridge's little office in Scorpion Bend.

"I swear that I don't know anything about those four men at the Lazy R," exploded the lawyer to his question. "Damn 'em, I—"

"Why damn them, if you know nothing about them?" queried Henry. "I ask you a simple question, and you—well, you blow up."

"I—I don't even know who they are," protested Hartridge.

"Haven't you asked Frank Neilan?"

"No, I—I haven't had an opportunity."

"By the way, Mr. Hartridge," Henry asked suddenly, "how do you *know* that this man is the real Frank Neilan?"

The lawyer could not hide his uneasiness at the question. He cleared his throat, shuffled some papers on his desk, before replying.

"Well, I wrote to him at his address," he said finally. "He wired that he was coming. He—he brought my letter—the one I wrote to him. Roarin' Bill told me that the young man was studying to be a mining expert, and—well, this young man seems to know something about mining. I really haven't any reason to doubt that he is Frank Neilan."

"I see . . . " nodded Henry. He leaned across the desk and continued, in a confidential tone. "Did William Rose ever mention to you that he had struck a rich vein of gold on his ranch, Hartridge?"

"No," replied Hartridge quickly. "No, he never mentioned it."

"I see. Well, he never mentioned it to me either."

"Then how did you know he struck it rich, Conroy?"

"Oh, merely a surmise on my part." Henry got to his feet. "Well, I must take the next stage back home. I thought you might possibly know something about those four men. I want them on suspicion of murder and robbery."

"Have you—er—looked for them at the Lazy R?"

"Yes, but they do not seem to be there any more."

"Good. I mean—it's a good thing for them, Sheriff."

"Yes, indeed. Well, I must be going, Mr. Hartridge." He strode out, leaving the lawyer to stare nervously after him.

It was still a half hour before the stage was due to leave for Tonto City; so Henry sauntered up to the depot. There he found Ben Conlan, the depot agent.

"Long time I no see yuh, Mr. Conroy,"

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smiled the agent. "They tell me yuh had a bank robbery and murder down at Tonto."

"Yes, we did, Ben," admitted Henry. "A very bad thing."

"Any idea who done it?"

"Not the slightest. You haven't seen any suspicious characters around here, have you, Ben?"

The agent shook his head.

"I guess they keep me too busy to look for suspicious folks. Now, if it had happened earlier I might have helped yuh."

"How was that?"

"It was the night after Ab Morgan was killed. About nine o'clock, I'd say. I was in there, poundin' brass, when a man came up close to the window. I took one good look at him, but he turned away. I'll tell yuh he was a suspicious-lookin' feller. He looked as though his head and face had all been beaten up. You know what I mean—all swelled, and with discolored spots. I don't know where he went. Maybe he grabbed the freight that was just ready to pull out."

"Probably a tramp who had been in a fight, or fallen off a train," suggested Henry.

"I suppose it was. He looked pretty ragged and was bareheaded."

"It was the night after Ab Morgan was killed, eh?" Henry asked.

"That's right. I thought I'd help the feller if I could find him, but when I came out, he was gone. Prob'ly saved myself a couple dollars."

"Very likely. Ben," asked Henry soberly, "have you ever seen a ghost?"

"No," laughed the agent, "I never have. Don't believe in 'em."

"Neither do I," agreed Henry. "Well, thank you, Ben."

Ben looked at him in a slightly puzzled fashion.

"For what?"

"You think of something—I can't," smiled Henry. With that he walked away toward the stage depot, leaving the depot agent to scratch his head and wonder what Henry had meant about ghosts.

OSCAR and Judge spent the morning in the hills at the Lazy R, trying to catch a glimpse of the four outlaws, but to no avail. Judge refused to discuss ghosts with Oscar, except to say:

"It is all poppycock, Oscar. There never was a ghost. If anyone asks my opinion, I shall say that the use of alcohol, derived from prunes, will cause severe hallucinations."

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar. "It is oll coffeepot."

"Poppycock, you—you Swede. Poppycock!"

"De same to you, Yudge. But Ay still know what Ay seen. It might be poppycock to you but it su-u-ure look' like Roarin' Bill to me."

Henry, when he met them later in Tonto City, had nothing new to impart, except that he suspected Hartridge of knowing that Roarin' Bill had discovered a mine.

"What did he say about Neilan?" asked Judge.

"Rather vague, Judge. I have no doubt in my mind that the young man is an impostor—but how can we prove it? And after all, it is none of our business."

"The breaking of a law is always our business, sir."

"Well, I am not going to lose any sleep over it. In fact, I like the young man. Unless I am mistaken, Miss Sally Morgan likes him, too."

"She does, eh? Would you let her marry an impostor—a liar, sir?"

"No-o-o, I would not like that, Judge. Perhaps it would not be fair to let her do a thing like that—if there was any danger of her ever finding out about it later."

"Why not make it a point to warn her?"

"We'd better find out—first."

"Yes, I guess that would be better, Henry. But how?"

"I wish I knew the answer to that one, Judge. In fact, there are many things that need answering. The ghost, for instance."

Judge nodded solemnly. "I was out there today—with Oscar. He is still shy about going near that tunnel."

"Aren't we all?" queried Henry.

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"But we both know that such a thing as a ghost does not exist."

"Yust poppycock," declared Oscar.

"Is that all?" grinned Henry.

"Va'al, of course dere vars some of Roarin' Bill," admitted Oscar.

"Oscar has been adding to his vocabulary, Judge," laughed Henry.

"Ay found out Ay can run like ha'al, too," said Oscar soberly. "Last night Ay yumped over a cactus sax feet high."

"And Judge ran around it, eh?"

"No, by yiminy! Yudge yumped it first."

LATE that afternoon, while Judge and Oscar took a siesta, Henry saddled his horse and rode away from town. He rode straight toward the Lazy R, until he came to the spot where they had left their horses the night before. He paused there, thinking to leave his horse; then he decided to ride closer.

"If I feel like running," he told the horse, "I do not need to make it a marathon."

There was not a soul in sight when, a hundred yards from the old Two-Gun tunnel, he dismounted. Leaving his horse, he walked on, very quietly, to the mouth of the tunnel. There he sat down to ponder over the situation. The place did not seem spooky in daylight. In fact, it seemed ridiculous to think of a ghost standing in the mouth of that tunnel.

Henry was indulging in a quiet laugh over the episode of the night before, when the laugh froze on his lips. Footsteps were thudding softly in the tunnel, coming toward the entrance. Henry slid his gun loose from the holster and cocked it quietly. Slowly he elevated the muzzle to cover the opening.

Out walked Roarin' Bill Rose, hatless, wearing an old, wrinkled gray suit of clothes!

He stopped short at sight of Henry and his wobbling six-shooter.

"Don't shoot, Henry," he said. "I ain't heeled."

"My goodness!" gasped Henry, lowering the muzzle of his gun. "Amazing!"

Roarin' Bill scratched his matted hair and grinned foolishly.

"Well, yuh got me," he admitted. "Yuh would—sooner or later."

"What is the idea of playing ghost?" queried Henry.

"I wasn't. Heck, I was only tryin' to keep out of sight. That danged fool lawyer and another feller came in here, and scared themselves into fits. Last night Cal Essex sneaked in on me—and went like hell. And what about you—last night. Wasn't the other two Judge and Oscar?"

"Well, Bill, you must admit that it was —er—ghastly. Do you not realize that you are supposed to be dead?"

"No, I didn't know that. I reckon I danged near did die. But what about me dyin'?"

Henry explained about the horse in Devil's Chimney, and how they decided that he had gone into it with the horse.

"I didn't know that," said the old man. "I don't even know where I fell off. Mebbe it was right near there, and I scared the horse over the edge."

"Did you walk to Scorpion Bend and take a freight train the next night?" asked Henry.

"Who told you?"

"Oh, I guessed it," smiled Henry.

"I'm not sure what I done. I was shot. Ab Morgan shot first. Got me through the ribs. After I saw he was dead, I got scared. Nobody saw us. I reckon I could have proved self-defense, but right at that time I was scared and hurt. I don't remember what I done. Mebbe I went to Scorpion Bend. Guess I did, 'cause they took me off a freight train in Black River City, and doctored me up. My head was a sight. The hole in my ribs didn't amount to much, but they said I'd have to stay for a week or two more. But I swiped a suit of clothes and sneaked out.

"I thought I'd keep on goin', but dang it, I wanted to find out what was goin' on over here. I figured I could hide out and get information. But I can't find out a danged thing, except that them doggoned horse-

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thieves have moved into my place, along with some jigger I never met. They had some grub cached over in Ab Morgan's old mine; so I took it over here. Henry, what do you know?"

Henry told him some of the things that had happened. In the fading light of the evening, Roarin' Bill Rose sat there and cursed Sam Hartridge and Ira Hallam for a pair of liars and thieves.

"But you did make out that will," said Henry.

"Course I made it out, dang it! I got a look at that young crook through a winder last night, and I wondered where I'd seen him. Why, he was with Hallam, when I gave that sample to him. Nephew—hell!"

Henry smiled slowly. "I thought he located the heir too quickly."

"Yo're danged right! I'm goin' up there and kick him out."

"Not yet, William. I want Hartridge and Hallam here, before you do that. I've suspected them quite a while. But what about those four outlaws from New Mexico? Where are they?"

"They're around here some'eres, Henry. Yuh say they robbed the bank and killed George Reed? Doggone 'em, they can't behave a-tall."

"They will hang—if we catch them, William," declared Henry.

"Yeah, I reckon they will. But what about me, Henry?"

"I believe you can prove self-defense. You did not shoot first."

"How can I prove that?"

"By the simple fact that Ab Morgan could not have fired a shot, after you shot him. He was killed instantly."

"My gosh!" gasped Roarin' Bill. "Henry, you've got brains."

"I hope to tell yuh," replied Henry. "You stay right here, William—so I can find you, in case I need you."

"Anything yuh say, Henry; you've made me feel danged good."

"I do not feel badly about it myself, William the Ghost."

Henry went back to his horse, started toward Tonto City. On second thought, he turned his horse. He had decided to go and have a talk with Frank Neilan.

CHAPTER XIII

UNMASKING

IT was just getting dark when Sally Morgan limped up to the Lazy R ranch house. Frank Neilan, alone at the house, saw her and ran out to meet her. One glance at her and he swept her up in his arms and carried her into the house. She bit her lips to keep from crying.

"What is it?" he asked her. "Miss—Sally, why did you walk over here?"

"I—I was afraid to stay home," she said. "The cook is drunk, and Cal Essex is the only one of the boys at home. Cal acts so funny. We don't know what's wrong with him. He wouldn't go to town, but he let all the horses loose except his own; so I couldn't get away. Oh, he told me about it. I crawled through a window—and walked. I wanted to get you to take me to Tonto City."

"Why, my dear, of course I will. I'm glad you came to me. It makes me feel that you trust me—and I want to be trusted—by you, Sally. You don't mind if I call you Sally, do you?"

"No, Frank."

"Golly, that's great! I'll bet your feet are blistered."

She smiled ruefully. "I think they are. But can't we hurry? I'm afraid of Cal Essex. If he missed me, he might come here."

Frank nodded. "He came here last night, Sally. He kicked the door open and came in, acting like a crazy man. Swore he was going to kill me. Then he reached for his gun—but just as suddenly he turned and walked away. I don't understand what he was thinking about."

"I believe he is crazy, Frank; I really do."

From outside came the sound of a horse walking on the hard ground. Sally looked quickly at Frank, fearful that it was the Quarter-Circle M foreman.

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He was thinking that too. "Get into that back room!" he whispered.

As Sally closed the connecting door, Frank Neilan took a gun from the fireplace mantle. A knock sounded.

"Come in," said Neilan tensely.

The door opened. It was Henry Harrison Conroy. Frank Neilan relaxed and placed the gun on the table.

"Good evening, Sheriff," he said.

Henry glanced at the gun. "Evidently you were not expecting me," he said dryly.

"One never knows whom to expect—in Arizona," Neilan answered.

"That is very true. Have your four friends been home lately?"

Neilan shook his head.

"I haven't seen them, Sheriff. Evidently they've left the valley."

"One never knows, does one?" queried Henry.

"You're riding late," observed Neilan.

"It seems," smiled Henry, "that we are fencing. Mr. Neilan, I have no weak spots in my armor tonight."

"I have no reason for fencing with you, Sheriff."

"Possibly not. However, I am asking you to do something for me."

"At your service, sir," smiled the young man. "Name it."

"Will you sit down at the table and write a note to Sam Hartridge, asking him and Ira Hallam to come here tomorrow night?"

"Why—" Neilan hesitated, looking curiously at Henry. "Why, that's a queer request. I don't understand the meaning of it, Sheriff."

"I merely want them here together tomorrow night, Neilan. I call you Neilan, because that is the name they gave you. What your right name is, I do not know—nor care. If you write the letter, saying that it is imperative that they come here, I'm very sure they will not ignore your summons."

"You say—*the name they gave me?*"

"Exactly," replied Henry firmly. "And do not edge toward that gun, sir. You are an imposter. Hartridge, Hallam and you, sir, conspired to take over this ranch, because of a rich gold vein discovered by Roarin' Bill Rose, just previous to the night he was—er—killed. You were substituted for a legal heir.

"Because you have not profited by this crooked move, nor have you been legally declared the heir to the Lazy R, I do not suppose the law can touch you. However, after the meeting here tomorrow night, I know of no reason why you should stay any longer in Wild Horse Valley, sir."

"I—I quite agree with you, Sheriff," nodded Neilan quietly.

The connecting door opened at that moment and Sally came out. She had heard all of the conversation. Henry looked at her in amazement.

"My dear Miss Sally!" he exclaimed.

"You see, Sheriff, it was—" began Neilan.

But Sally interrupted. "I believe it would be better if I told him the story, while he takes me to Tonto City," she said.

"Why, I was going—"

"Not now," said Sally coldly. "If Mr. Conroy doesn't mind . . . "

"My dear lady—it is an honor."

Neilan looked at Sally for a long moment. Then he turned to Henry. "There are horses and saddles in the stable, Sheriff," he said.

"Thank you, sir. If you will write that note—"

Neilan made no objection, but sat down at once and wrote the note. The sheriff pocketed it.

"May I saddle the horse?" asked Neilan.

Sally shook her head. "We can handle that nicely."

As they were going out, Neilan said:

"Sally, I'm sorry."

But she did not turn her head. Henry closed the door.

Neilan sat down in a rickety old chair, rolled and lighted a cigarette, his face grim. Then he laughed quietly.

"Well, you poor fool, you wanted adventure," he muttered half-aloud. "And if this isn't adventure—what is adventure?"

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THIRTY minutes later Pecos Charley, Sody Slade, Ed Clovis and Zibe Tucker came filing in through the rear doorway of the Lazy R ranch house. Neilan was still sitting there.

"Saw the sheriff and a lady leave here a while ago," said Pecos.

Neilan nodded. "Yes, and you boys will keep fooling around until they hang all of you for that murder in Tonto City. Why didn't you leave the country?"

"Aw, we never killed that feller, Frank."

"You'd have a fine time proving it."

"You can't scare us away, feller," declared Ed Clovis. "There's too much of our money tied up in that old tunnel down there."

"It looks bad for all of us," remarked Neilan.

"How do yuh mean—bad?"

"If you're around here tomorrow night you will hear Hartridge, Hallam and myself denounced as crooks."

"Yuh mean—they're onto yuh?" asked Pecos quickly.

"Yes."

"Who the heck discovered that, Frank?"

"The sheriff."

"That pot-nose? Yuh don't mean it!"

"Sorry, Pecos; but he made me write a note to Hartridge and Hallam, asking them to be here tomorrow evening. If the law is obliged to take over this place, what chance have you fellows to ever dig out that gold?"

"By the horns on the moon, I believe we're sunk!" blurted Clovis.

"We might fix that sheriff t'night," suggested Tucker grimly.

"No killin', Zibe," warned Pecos. "We ain't killers—except to save our own lives. And you better remember that."

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Sody of Neilan. "Are you goin' to stay here and face the music?"

"Yes, I am," replied Neilan. "Because of the fact that I have never accepted this ranch as a legal heir, nor have I profited by any deals, the law can't touch me. I merely moved in here, under the name of Frank Neilan. I suppose there are a number of Frank Neilans in the world who aren't nephews of Roarin' Bill Rose."

"Yeah," sighed Sody, "I guess yo're in the clear; but we're sunk deeper than ever. I dunno what to do. I suppose, if we was wise, we'd hightail out of here right now."

"Let's go back to the hideout and talk it over," suggested Pecos. "I git nervous, settin' here in the house. They might move in on us at any old time." With the words, he got up. "*Adios*, Kid. If we don't come back—good luck to yuh."

"Same to you, boys," replied Neilan. "It's a great life."

"I wish I had mine to live over again," growled Ed Clovis. "I'd be a farmer."

"Yeah—and steal yore neighbors' spuds," laughed Pecos. "*Buenas noches, amigo.*"

AS they rode back to Tonto City, Henry listened to Sally's story. The power of suggestion, he realized, must have affected Essex' mind. The subsequent ghost episode at the Two-Gun tunnel had not been exactly beneficial to him; and it was quite possible that the man, in his present mental state, might be very dangerous.

Sally had explained, of course, how she happened to be at the Lazy R ranch house. Neither she nor Henry referred to the exposé of Frank Neilan. It was evident to Henry that Sally's affections had received a rude jolt when she heard that the young man was an impostor.

"It is evident that something must be done about Mr. Essex," he told her. "You are in danger, as long as he is in his present mental state. You will stay at the hotel, until something is done."

"You know what he threatens to do," said Sally wearily.

"If he attempts it," declared Henry, "we will take him to court and prove that he is insane."

That night, Henry sent a man to Scorpion Bend with the message to Hartridge. It was to be dropped in the post office, so that Hartridge could not question the bearer. Back at his office, Henry said nothing to Judge about meeting Roarin'

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Bill Rose, nor of his conversation with the young man at the Lazy R.

CAL ESSEX came to town next afternoon. He rode in alone. He went to the Tonto Saloon, where he stayed about an hour. Then he went to the Tonto Hotel, where he talked with Tom Rickey. Rickey told him that Miss Morgan had come into town with Henry Conroy the night before, and was now in her room.

Henry had seen Essex ride in, and he had seen him go to the hotel. Judge was in the office, unaware that trouble might be brewing. Henry, from the doorway, saw Essex coming toward the office from the hotel. He himself went back to his desk and he sat down. He slid a six-shooter onto his lap and tried to appear indifferent. Judge was reading a newspaper and did not notice this.

Cal Essex stepped into the little office, his arms swinging at his sides, and stopped near Henry's desk. Judge glanced up.

"Good morning, Cal," he said pleasantly.

But Cal Essex was not interested in the morning nor in Judge; he was squinting at Henry.

"I just came to tell you," he said in a brittle voice, "that you better keep yore damn red nose out of my business, Conroy."

The muzzle of the big six-shooter jerked above the desk top, level with Essex' middle.

"Elevate them, Mr. Essex," said Henry calmly. "Higher, please—this gun has a soft trigger."

"Why—damn you . . . you . . . "

Essex might have been a trifle crazy, but he was no fool. His hands lifted above his head.

Judge dropped his paper. "Of all things!" he exclaimed.

"When you have recovered your equilibrium, Judge," said Henry, "you might remove Mr. Essex' gun."

Judge came forward, lifted the gun gingerly from the holster, and placed it carefully on Henry's desk.

"Now," said Henry, "you might prepare Room Number One for our guest."

"You—you are putting him in jail?"

"Like hell, you are!" yelled Essex.

"You will go to jail—or to the morgue," said Henry firmly.

"Why, I ain't done anything, damn yuh! You can't put a man in jail when he ain't done anything."

"I have often wondered if it could be done," said Henry. "A little while ago I made a bet with myself that it couldn't be done. Now, I'm going to win that bet. Turn around and follow Judge."

Swearing impotently, Cal Essex entered the cell. Henry shot the bolts.

"Damn you, I'll get you for this, Conroy," declared Essex.

"Not until you get out," said Henry. "I shall do my worrying when you do get out."

Back in the office Judge turned to Henry.

"You cannot hold this man, Henry," he declared. "There is no charge against him."

"Disturbing the peace, Judge. He has been annoying Sally Morgan."

"Did she prefer charges?"

"All right, all right! Then he threatened me. You heard him."

"Yes, that is true. Well, a day or so in jail might cool him off."

Henry went to the hotel and told Sally what he had done.

"I am afraid it will only make him worse," said Sally. "If he would only agree to leave the country."

"Well," smiled Henry, "he is in a spot where it will be easy for you to discharge him. I will turn him loose, if he will agree to leave the country. Suppose you give me what wages he has coming, and I will do the rest."

Sally was agreeable to that. Henry went back to talk with Cal Essex. The foreman listened glumly to his offer.

"All right," agreed Essex finally. "Give me the money and I'll quit the damn outfit. I'll have to go to the ranch and pick up my war-sack and what few things I've got there. Then I'll come back here. How's that? Does it suit yuh, Fat Nose?"

"Perfectly," replied Henry. "You can

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have your gun, when you return to town."

"That's all right."

Henry unlocked the door. Essex walked out of the office and went straight to the hitch-rack. There he mounted his horse and rode swiftly out of town.

"I hope this is the end of Mr. Essex, as far as Wild Horse Valley is concerned," said Henry as he watched him go.

"I would not trust him very far," sighed Judge.

"By the way, Judge, we are holding a little party at the Lazy R this evening, and you will attend—you and Oscar."

"A little party at the Lazy R? What kind of a party?"

"I am not exactly sure—yet. Possibly a ghost party."

"Damn it, Henry, be explicit!"

"I can't, Judge; the entertainment hasn't been all arranged."

"Skulduggery?"

"Well, not exclusively, Judge. Perhaps a touch or two."

"Have you told Oscar?"

"Not yet. Always invite Oscar at the last moment—otherwise he might invite the rest of the town."

Henry left the office then, went down toward the hotel. About an hour later he came back.

"I left Cal Essex' gun with the bartender at the Tonto," he told Judge. "You and Oscar will secure a horse and buggy and take Sally Morgan home. Essex will likely be here, before you leave. I'm going for a little ride."

"Where?" asked Judge.

"Peddling invitations to the party at the Lazy R. You take Sally home, and then come to the Lazy R. You two might entertain some of the early guests—if there are any, Judge."

Judge shook his head wearily. "Henry, there are times when—"

"You have told me that same thing many times."

"Very well. If I must go blindly—I go blindly."

"Naturally," remarked Henry dryly. He went back to the stable to saddle his horse.

CHAPTER XIV

PARTY AT THE LAZY R

SALLY MORGAN was waiting in the doorway of the hotel, when Judge and Oscar drove up.

"Isn't Mr. Conroy going along?" she asked.

"Mr. Conroy, if I may say so, be damned," replied Judge quietly. "You do not mind the profanity, I hope."

"No, I am used to it," laughed Sally. "But why should he be damned?"

"Yudge is sore because Hanry don't tell him everything," stated Oscar.

"No one asked your opinion, Oscar," reminded Judge.

"Ay yust vant her to know de truth, Yudge."

Sally laughed at the lugubrious expression on Judge's face.

"I am sure that Mr. Conroy means well," she said.

"I suppose so," agreed Judge grudgingly.

"It is very kind of you to take me home."

"Hanry sent us," replied Oscar blandly. "He gives orders and ve take 'm."

"Oh, shut up!" blurted Judge. "One would think we were slaves."

"Two," corrected Oscar. "Ay feel de same as you do, Yudge."

"And that, Miss Morgan, is a sample of the life I lead," sighed Judge.

About a mile out of Tonto City they met Cal Essex, his war-sack tied to his saddle. He merely reined off the road to let them pass, but did not speak.

"That takes a load off my mind," said Sally soberly. "I hope I never see him again."

"He will be obliged to leave the Valley, in order to get work," said Judge. "He is not very popular."

They were nearing where the road forked to the Lazy R, when they met Dan Leary. He waved wildly and reined up in a cloud of dust.

"I was just comin' in to get the sheriff,"

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he told them. "Me and Steve McClung and Art Miller captured them four outlaws that have been hangin' around the Lazy R. They was livin' in an old prospector's shack on the Quarter-Circle M. We've got 'em hogtied at the Lazy R ranch house. There wasn't enough horses to bring 'em to town; so I came to get you fellers."

"Well my gracious!" exclaimed Judge. "You—you actually caught them, did you? Well, well!"

"We shore did. And we want yuh to take 'em off our hands."

"Why, yes, of course. I—I—Miss Morgan, do you mind riding up to the Lazy R? We can put Oscar in charge of the prisoners, and then I will take you home."

"That's perfectly all right," answered Sally.

"We ain't seen that Neilan hombre," informed Dan Leary. "Mebbe he seen us comin' and pulled out—I dunno."

"Why should he pull out?" queried Judge.

Dan Leary grinned. "I dunno. Feelin' guilty—mebbe."

Judge shot a quick glance at Sally. Her lips were tightly shut, and she was looking straight ahead.

"We will follow you up there, Leary," Judge said.

THEY drove up to the front of the ranch house. There two saddled horses were tied in the shade. Sally stayed in the buggy as Judge and Oscar went forward. Sitting along a wall, tied hand and foot, were Pecos Charley Peters, Sody Slade, Ed Clovis and Zibe Tucker. The four outlaws looked foolishly at Judge and Oscar.

"There's yore killers and robbers," said Steve McClung. "When the law can't get 'em—we can, eh, boys?"

"Any old time," agreed Dan Leary expansively. "Any reward, Judge?"

"I don't believe there is. They haven't been indicted yet."

"Ain't been what?"

"Charged legally with the crime."

"We never done it," growled Pecos Charley. "We ain't been near that town."

"Toff lookin' yiggers," declared Oscar.

"Very," agreed Judge. "Hm-m-m. I am wondering how to get them back to Tonto City. Perhaps we shall have to get some horses, or a wagon."

"Be dark pretty blamed soon," observed Leary. "Yuh better make up yore mind, Judge; we want to git home. Have yuh seen Cal Essex?"

"Mr. Essex quit the job, rolled up his blankets, and is now on his way out of the Valley."

"No!"

"My statement is correct," said Judge stiffly. "I am not in the habit of lying, sir."

"I'll be a hen's offspring!" exclaimed Art Miller.

"Suit yourself," said Judge. He turned to Oscar. "I believe I shall leave you here to guard the prisoners, while I take Miss—"

"Here comes another horse and buggy," interrupted Leary. "Now, who in the devil is this?"

It proved to be Sam Hartridge and Ira Hallam, coming in answer to Neilan's note. They got gingerly out of their buggy. Hartridge spoke to Sally, looked around uneasily at the group of men. Then Judge walked over to him, told him about the four prisoners. After that Hallam and Hartridge seemed less nervous, and when Judge suggested that they all go into the house, they followed him. It was getting so dark that Judge lighted the lamp.

"Where is Frank Neilan?" asked Hartridge.

"Yeah—where is he?" replied Leary. "I reckon he pulled out."

"Why—why should he pull out?" asked Hallam weakly.

"Well, he's gone," laughed Leary.

"I—I think we ought to go back, Sam," said Hallam. "Neilan isn't here. No use of us staying."

"Well . . . yes . . . I guess . . . "

"What did you want Neilan for?" asked Judge.

"He sent for me," replied Hartridge. "I'm his lawyer."

"He'll prob'ly need one," laughed Leary.

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"If yuh ask—" He broke off, listening.

"What was that?" blurted Judge. "A woman's scream?"

He started toward the doorway, jerked back as two men stepped in. Judge's jaw sagged.

"Yudas!" gasped Oscar.

"Roarin' Bill Rose!" wheezed Pecos Charley Peters.

"Henry!" whispered Judge. "Henry Conroy!"

"Present," replied Henry. "Good evening, gentlemen. Ah, my friends from Scorpion Bend . . . Welcome to the party."

But no one was paying any attention to Henry—they were all watching Roarin' Bill Rose. Roarin' Bill looked grimly around. His eyes swept over the four captives, and he laughed harshly.

"They got yuh, eh?" he remarked. "Not a brain among yuh."

JUDGE took a deep breath, realizing by now that it was actually Roarin' Bill Rose, in the flesh. Lightning and Thunder came in through the kitchen entrance, curious to know what was going on. They saw Roarin' Bill. Lightning swayed, threw both arms around Thunder, burying his head in Thunder's bosom, and they both fell down. And at that moment Sally stepped inside the doorway, her face a mixture of fright and astonishment.

"My—my dear Mr. Rose," gasped Hartridge.

"Don't talk to me, you—you crook!" roared Roarin' Bill. "You and that damn assayer! Yes, you—Hallam! I know what yuh done. The two of yuh thought I was dead; so yuh planned to steal this ranch. Don't you dare lie, or I'll crawl all over yuh."

"No . . . no," whispered the frightened Hallam. "We didn't know—"

"Yo're danged right, yuh didn't know *when you was well off*. You aimed to steal my ranch and git that gold mine. Well, you was wrong. That gold mine ain't on my land. It ain't on anybody's land; it's all dug out. I'll tell yuh where—"

"Bill!" blurted Pecos Charley.

"Shut up!" snapped Roarin' Bill. "I'm tellin' this. Them four tied-up badmen found the vein in Morgan's old mine; so they dug it out, packed the sacks of ore over to my old Two-Gun tunnel and cached all of it. It's right there now, and it belongs to Sally Morgan."

Everyone looked at Sally. She stepped closer to Roarin' Bill. He smiled at her and said:

"Howdy, Sally."

"We thought you were dead," she said.

"Well, I ain't. I reckon I'm awful tough. But," he looked around, "where is that danged young crook who claimed this ranch? I want to slap his ears off—the dirty snake."

"He's gone," said Leary. "I reckon he pulled out."

"Pulled out, eh? Lucky thing for him that he did. I'd show him how to dance."

"That will—" faltered Hartridge, and Roarin' Bill turned on him.

"Yea-a-ah! Exactly! I seen that young feller. I looked through a winder here and got a good look at him. Thought I'd seen him before. Damn you, Hallam, that young feller was with you the day I gave you that sample for assay. Yo're a fine pair of crooks, you and Hartridge."

"Go ahead," grinned Oscar. "Ay like it."

"Keep your nose out of it," ordered Judge.

"Yah, su-ure."

"I want to git my hands on that young crook," declared Roarin' Bill. "I'd like to make an example—"

A scraping noise at the doorway caused them to turn—and gasp at what they saw.

Standing there in the doorway, swaying on his feet, was Cal Essex—a double-barreled shotgun gripped in his hands, the twin muzzles covering the room. He was hatless, his face a bloody smear, his shirt in ribbons, one eye almost closed.

"Cal!" gasped Leary. "Cal—don't . . ."

"A fine pot-shot," laughed Essex huskily. "Damn yuh, I've got all of yuh together—even the woman. I'll show yuh. Fire me . . . put me in that damn jail. Crazy am I? Well, I'm sane enough to shoot straight.

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Don't move! Yo're all goin' to die; so yuh might as well take it right.

"I killed that damn Neilan. I told him I would. Now I'm goin' to make a clean sweep."

"Cal, you're—" began Leary fearfully.

"Shut up! Yo're goin' to take it, and yo're goin' to take it—"

BUT he didn't finish. There was a *thud, thud* of running steps on the gravel just outside, and a dim form hurtled into Cal Essex. The shotgun flamed, but the muzzles were up, throwing the lethal charges of buckshot into the empty air. The two men crashed down in a snarling, cursing blur. Oscar Johnson dove through the doorway like a halfback tearing through the line with the ball, and went headlong into them.

"Oh right!" yelled Oscar. "Ay got him!"

The struggling mass disintegrated. Oscar had Cal Essex in his mighty hands, staggering toward the lighted doorway, while behind them came Frank Neilan. No one knew who he was until he staggered into the room. His face was bloody from a gash in his scalp. His lips were puffed, his eyes purple, but he was grinning foolishly.

Henry quickly handcuffed the unconscious Essex. Sally was staring at Neilan.

"Essex said he killed you," said Henry.

"It wasn't his fault that I'm not dead," panted Neilan. "I—I was over by the Morgan ranch, when Essex came there. He took his bedroll and rode away. I started back home and was on top of a hill, when I—I saw your buggy going toward this place.

"Then I saw Essex coming back. When your buggy was out of sight, he raced his horse back to the ranch; so I followed. I wondered what he was going to do. He went to an old dugout, got something out of there, and then came back to the end of the house. He crawled under.

"He—he was fixing a dynamite blast, when I surprised him. Luckily he had no gun, and so," Neilan laughed, "it was a good fight, until he hit me on the head with a rock. I guess he thought I was dead. When I regained consciousness I saw him come from the bunkhouse with a shotgun, and go to his horse. So I—I followed him here."

"And just in time, too," said Henry. "That crazy fool might have murdered all of us."

"I hope t' tell yuh!" blurted Roarin' Bill.

"What the devil!" snorted Henry. For Frank Neilan had lifted the revolver from Henry's holster and stepped aside. Now he was covering Dan Leary, Steve McClung and Art Miller, who were standing together.

"Put bracelets on them, Sheriff," panted Neilan. "Those three and Cal Essex were the four masked men who held up the bank and killed the cashier. Essex told me all about it. He said Leary killed Reed, and—"

"That dirty liar!" cried Leary. "He shot Reed himself!"

"You can't prove it," snarled Essex.

"The hell he can't!" rasped Miller. "We all knew that."

Oscar and Judge quickly handcuffed the three men. Taking a deep breath, Neilan handed the gun back to Henry.

"Did Cal Essex confess to you?" asked Henry.

"Can you think of any reason for him to confess to me?" countered Neilan soberly. "Essex may be crazy, but he would be worse than crazy to confess a crime that would hang him."

"Wait a minute!" choked Roarin' Bill. "Who's this feller?"

"This feller," replied Henry, "is the young man who inherited the Lazy R, after you died. This young man, who seems to have been through a meat-grinder, is known as Frank Neilan, the heir to the Lazy R."

"He is, eh?" gritted Roarin' Bill. "You jist saved my life and a lot of other lives, but I jist want to tell yuh that——"

"Wait just a minute," interrupted the young man. "I am glad you came back, because I wanted to ask you a question."

"Of all the gall!" exploded Roarin' Bill.

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"You wanted to ask *me* a question? Well, you brass-faced young fool—go ahead and ask."

"Did you," asked the young man, "have a brother Albert, who became a preacher?"

"Yu—yes."

"And did you have a sister named Cora, who married a man named John Neilan?"

"Why—dang yuh—I did!"

"They were my father and my mother."

"Yo're father and——"

ROARIN' BILL came closer, staring into the battered features of the young man.

"Dug up some information, eh?" he said. "Smart, eh? Well, I'll bust yore smartness, you young pup. What was my sister's nickname? Answer that one—if yuh can."

"My father," replied the young man, "called her Happy."

And then—Roarin' Bill smiled. "Happy. That's what she was. Hell, I was the black sheep of the family. I lost track of 'em—mostly. I got a letter from Albert a couple years ago and he—wait a minute! Dang it, is yore name really Frank Neilan?"

"Absolutely," replied the young man.

"Then—then how in the devil did you happen——"

"It just happened. I studied mining, and drifted west. I was broke and down on my luck in Scorpion Bend, when I met Hallam. I didn't have a cent. Hallam fed me and when this deal came up—well, I needed money, and I scented adventure. When they mentioned the name of Frank Neilan, I—I thought it was only a coincidence, because I'd never heard of you. I didn't know I had an uncle out here."

"We are vindicated!" blurted Hartridge.

"You be damned!" snorted Roarin' Bill. "You ain't nothin' but a crooked lawyer—even if luck is with yuh."

Frank Neilan turned and walked over to Sally.

"I hope you forgive me, Sally," he said. "I'd hate to go away, knowing that you wouldn't forgive me for playing a crooked game."

"What do yuh mean—goin' away?" rasped Roarin' Bill. "You're a miner, ain't yuh? Sally might need a good man. I'll betcha you can uncover that vein again in her mine."

"After the crooked deal I pulled here?" queried Frank.

"Crooked? Hell's bells, kid, I got here jist ahead of the law. I'd be a fine whip-poorwill to call anybody crooked."

"I'll need a foreman for the ranch, too," said Sally. "I—I seem to have lost all my hired hands."

Frank Neilan grinned. He looked at the four outlaws who had just been exonerated from any hand in the bank robbery and murder. His uncle's gaze followed his own.

"There's yore crew," laughed Roarin' Bill. "If it's all right with the law, I'll guarantee that they'll play straight."

"The law," declared Henry Harrison Conroy, "is satisfied. We have the men we wanted—thanks to Frank Neilan."

Frank turned and looked at Sally. She was smiling.

"You will need at least four men, Frank," she said. He smiled too, and he turned to Henry.

"If you'll release my four cowboys, Sheriff," he said, "we will be on our way to the ranch."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "You work fast, Neilan. This has been quite a party. But as I have always said—anything can happen in Arizona."

"That was said before you were born," remarked Judge.

"I but perpetuate the truth, sir," replied Henry.

"Ain't yuh goin' to arrest me?" asked Roarin' Bill.

"No," replied Henry. "Come in tomorrow and we will talk it over with Judge Myers. The plain facts will exonerate you, William. And to you,"—— Henry held out his hand to Sally—"I wish all the luck in the world. We haven't had a wedding in Tonto City for ages—but it looks as though the drouth is about to be broken."

And judging by the glance that passed then between Frank and Sally, there

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seemed little doubt but that Henry's prophecy would be fulfilled.

AT THAT point Thunder and Lightning Mendoza stole out of the kitchen, where they had been listening all the while, and sat down on the back steps of the ranch house.

"W'at you theenk, eh?" whispered Thunder.

"W'at you mean—theenking?"

"W'at 'appen, which I am asking about?" explained Thunder.

"Leesten my leetle brodder," said Lightning, "sometime I'm theenk you haven't got a brain in my head for looking nor leestening."

"Sure," agreed Thunder. "But w'at 'appen to everybodee?"

"In the firs' place," explained Lightning, "Onkle Beel ees not dead. He ees *tio* to thees yo'ng man, but I don' know it. You onnerstand?"

"You don' know eet. Sure. I onnerstand. But w'at 'appen?"

"I theenk that theese damn Morgan *vaqueros* do sometheeng wrong."

"W'at they do wrong?"

"*Por Dios!* You theenk I am jodge? Why you don' use my ear and eye for seeing theengs? You think I leesten for whole damn family?"

The cavalcade was leaving the Lazy R. Thunder and Lightning stood on the back steps and watched the string of buggies and riders grow dim, as they went toward Tonto City.

"I'm theenking that thees yo'ng man ees going to marry weeth Sally Morgan," remarked Lightning.

"Eet seem to me," observed Thunder, "that sometheeng 'appen to everybodee, but me and you."

From inside the ranch house came Roarin' Bill's voice.

"Thunder! Lightnin'! Where the devil are you—you colorado-maduro manhandlers of the King's English?"

"Don' be too sure," whispered Lightning. They went into the house.

THE END

Page Daniel Boone

IT LOOKS as if we no longer have with us those mighty American riflemen, the sure-shots of the old days. Or perhaps the hunter of the present day is just too lazy to work hard for his game. According to the Forest Service, most of these hunters can't even get an elk.

An elk is hardly what one could call a tiny target, but on the Gallatin Forest in Montana this year, 1,594 hunters tried their luck during the one-month open season, and brought down only 101 elk. Officials had expected to see the herd reduced about 750 to 1,000 head. On the Lewis and Clark and Flathead National Forests, where 1,161 hunters roamed, the result was much the same—only about half the expected number bagged.

This can be partially explained by the fact that snows were late in coming this year, and the elk remained longer in the high mountains where hunters could not get at them without a great deal of climbing. But what really troubles the Forest Service about all this is the fact that, because of the resultant overcrowded range, a good many of the elk that weren't killed may starve to death.

—*Charles Dorman*

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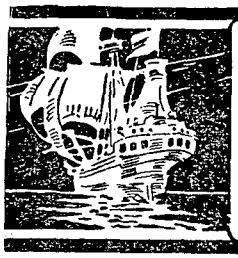

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THIS message from the inner sanctum of Your Editors was jotted down in invisible ink and subsequently smuggled out to our trusty printers via carrier pigeon and dog sled. We trust that it reaches you and that it reads coherently.

Our present besiegement in our own Ivory Tower (where we subsist frugally upon pemmican, caviar and Le Page's glue) is a result of our own rashness. We blame no one. It's our own fault if we can't keep our big mouths shut. Little did we reck, however, that our simple discursion upon the pixies who inhabit our office and make ARGOSY the only four dimensional magazine in America—ah, little did we reck what consequence lay in store for us as a result of that moment of braggadocio.

But now we know. No sooner had our declaration of fact hit the newsstands than the deluge descended. The press photographers began the assault, clamoring for permission to snap Z-ray photos of our little assistants. A blistering wire from the American Institute of Psychic Phenomena demanded that we submit immediate proof to their investigators or be forthwith branded as charlatans. Three circus press agents telephoned to obtain publicity hookups. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer wondered what our terms would be to allow our Little Folks to appear in support of the Dionne Quintuplets in their next picture. England wanted them at the coronation. France wanted them in the next cabinet. The Smithsonian Institute said they would trade two giant pandas, one aardvark, a monolith and cash for one authentic pixie.

And that was just the beginning.

In a space of hours, it seemed, public interest rose to fever heat. Our telephones *brrranged* constantly. Our outer office was jammed with those who came for a personal look-see. Our mailmen began to grow bowlegged beneath the avalanche of requests for more information about our Little Ones, pleas for autographed photos, for an old pixie shoe or a strand of hair.

The curious had gathered eight deep in the hall outside when we went to lunch. One vociferous lady shouted an offer of adoption. A beauteous blonde was willing to trade autographs of Clark Gable, Mussolini, Chief Justice Hughes and Walter Winchell for the scrawled *X* of one of our Little Men. We managed to crowd through the press of them without injury. We returned by a secret entrance, for by then the mob was sixteen deep. It is now ten o'clock in the evening and our visitors show no signs of dispersing. We have had no supper. We are planning to sleep on our desks. And there's no telling how long this siege will continue.

A spokesman for the group outside has asked for certain information which can be broadcast to his fellow pixie-devotees. We can only tell him, and the rest of you, that we're just managing to get acquainted with these little fellows ourselves. We can't tell where they're from—we're not even sure of their names. And as for letting you inspect them through our Infra-Penetro-Scope—can't you people understand how the shouting and confusion has frightened them? They have evanished to the Secret Place and no cajoling will bring them out.

That's the jam we're in. The crowd will not disperse until we produce the Little Folks. The Little Folks will not appear until the crowd has gone. What, oh what, are we to do?

Perhaps we can calm our jangled nerves by attending to the letters. First off:

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H. F. SHUMWAY

The first stop on my journey with ARGOSY is always the Argonotes, and as I have never expressed myself before, in spite of the desire to do so, I feel that from point of service as a member of the "crew" I am entitled to say a few words.

About twenty-one years ago my work took me away from home and my schooldays sweetheart. The former was not so bad, but the latter was "hard to take" and to help pass the lonely hours, I bought my first ARGOSY. A year later I was married, but still continued to read the magazine that had helped me over a lonely year and since that time I have hardly missed a dozen copies.

Regardless of any changes, the ARGOSY has always been "tops" with me, and I have no complaint in any way. I always read every story because I know that any story worth printing in your magazine is worth reading, and I enjoy them all. Right here I wish to say that my geographical knowledge has probably increased a hundred fold since visiting every point on the globe on the good ship.

My fifteen year old son is as enthusiastic about the ARGOSY as I am and occasionally the lady of the house will read a story or two, particularly W. C. Tuttle's "Henry" stories. After the family has finished with them, the ARGOSIES are all stacked in order, and about twice a year I make a trip to the Seneca Indian Reservation where several Indian friends are waiting for them, and it is beyond me to tell how much pleasure is derived from my original investment of 10c, needless to say I know it is plenty.

In closing I wish to say that I have spent over twenty years of keen enjoyment and pleasure with ARGOSY and only hope that I may be permitted to spend another twenty years in the same manner.

East Randolph, N. Y.

WITH all those kind words to say, we can't understand why Reader Shumway has hesitated for so long at saying them. We're glad he's spoken out now.

Here is a man whose epistle leans a bit toward the critical, however. Says

SAUL WINER

As I have just finished the "Henry" serial "High Heels—and Henry," here is what I thought of it:

I am sorry to say that it did not quite compare with the other "Henries." As I have read them all from "Henry Goes to Arizona" to the latest, I know what I am talking about. However, I read in Argonotes that a new "Henry" is coming, so let's hope it will compare and be up to par with all the former ones.

Another kick is about "Pretty Boy" by Max Brand. The main part of the story was O. K. but the ending seems to have something missing. It really should have ended in a clinch between "Sis" and "Mike," for no matter how tough we are, we are all romantics at heart.

Now, that the kicks are all in, here's a boost for Bennett Foster's "Riding Gun." I read in Argonotes that it has been made into a book. They also should make a movie out of it too.

What are you doing about the ARGOSY Quarterly idea? Publish ARGOSY weekly for new stuff and use the Quarterly for old favorites, the readers to write in which they want re-published

Brooklyn, N. Y.

WELL, after that outburst about the pixies, we thought we'd let you—and us—regain our sanity momentarily; but now we're off again. Below is a letter that we guarantee will completely confuse you—at first. Then comes the surprise. That's the way we read it when it first came in to us, and that's the way we print it. After all, it isn't every day we can print a letter with a surprise ending, so hark to

FRANK C. BRUTON

We have no news except Cols. Emerson & Stockton has been boaring for salt on Rennox Struck a lake of oil. The well has been running for the last three days throughing out large quantities of Rock Oil. It would Sprout Out at least fifteen feet above the top of the ground as large a stream as a mans Boddy. Perfectly Pure Cumberland River has been covered from Bank to Bank for three days the River was then set on fire I have no doubt but in the time it has been Running to speke in the bounds of Reason that five hundred thousand gallons of oil has run down Cumb. River. It is still running but not quite so fast Col. Emerson has barreld up twenty barrels of it. It burns well in a lamp and is good to paint well and oil leather & I have no doubt it will be a good medison for mans complaints particularly the Rumatic pains. The hole atmospher is perfumed with it. It is a complete phenominon I could write a hole shete and not say half it is late and I am sleepy.

I am yours, Etc.

Thos Ellison

The above is an exact copy, spelling and punctuation included, of a letter in the possession of Howard W. Hardaway of Louisville, Ky. After reading the article by Edmund Otis Hovey in the March 20th ARGOSY I hope this will merit publication.

The Old American Oil Well, as we call it here, was struck while drilling for salt. The well had

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gone much deeper than most salt wells and friends of the driller had advised him to quit "boaring." The driller, an obstinate fellow, insisted that he intended to keep going down until he struck salt water or hell. After striking the gusher and seeing the Cumberland River ablaze the driller fled, evidently thinking he had invaded the lower region, and was never heard from again. It evidently was a "complete phenominon."

Many people agreed with Mr. Ellison's statement that, "I have no doubt it will be a good medison for mans complaints," for the oil was bottled and sold extensively in America. Great quantities were also shipped abroad, particularly to England. Several bottles of the original oil with the advertisement molded in the glass are still in Burkesville, Ky.

In 1833 the well was plugged. In 1929 a company drilling for gas discovered the old wooden casings. About a hundred and sixty feet down they found an old cedar post and a quantity of flax seed, showing how the well had been plugged. Several pieces of the old casing are still in Burkesville remarkably well preserved.

While in the Kentucky Legislature I was able to have the State erect a marker by the old site. The old well is only a few feet from the Burkesville, Columbia highway by Renox bridge.

Burkesville, Ky.

THE letter in Reader Bruton's possession is, we think, a fine bit of Americana and we're glad to put it into print. For a good explanation of how oil wells were first regarded in America, we can also refer you to Warren Padgett's article, "When Oil Was Just a Drug," in the November 21st ARGOSY of last year.

Looking Ahead!

THE SMOKING LAND

No old-timer in Alaska had ever heard of it. Esquimaux legend knew it not—this strange, unholy and forgotten realm on the farthest borderland of ice and snow—this Smoking Land, where time had melted into vapor. But Bill Cassidy had to find it, had to prove to himself that it existed. A new novel of science, fantasy, and adventure by

GEORGE CHALLIS

THE WHITE FLOWER

Here is a striking story of China as it is today, rich with color and filled with excitement. When an ex-Marine sailed up the Yang-tse with a consignment of munitions for the highest bidder, he knew there was danger ahead—but he couldn't foretell that the destiny of a whole province would be placed in his hands. A complete novelet by

SINCLAIR GLUCK

READER, I KILLED HIM

The long arm of coincidence stretches to unbelievable lengths to trap the most artless slayer who ever planned a homicide. Crime, for once, pays a handsome dividend of chuckles. A blue-ribbon story by

DALE CLARK

Coming in Next Week's Argosy—May 29th.

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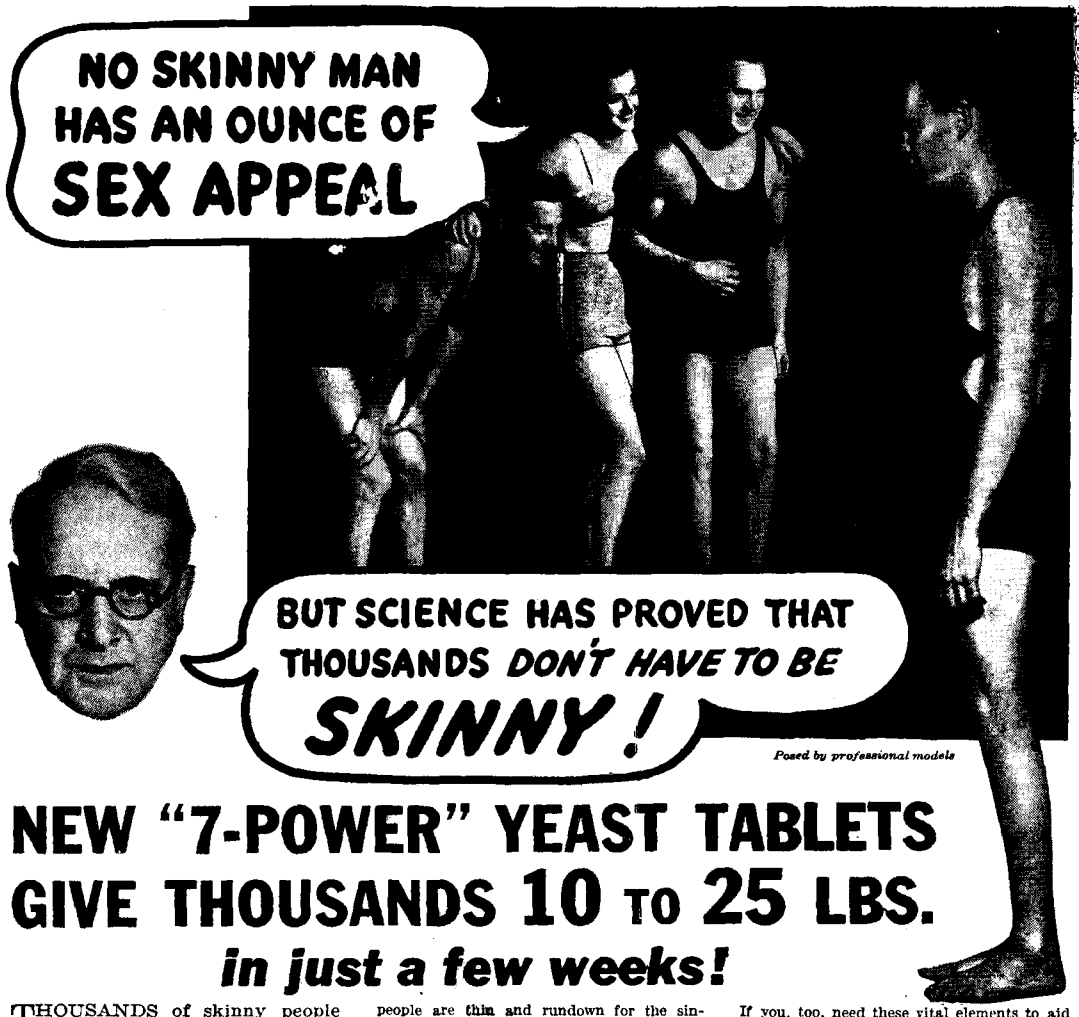

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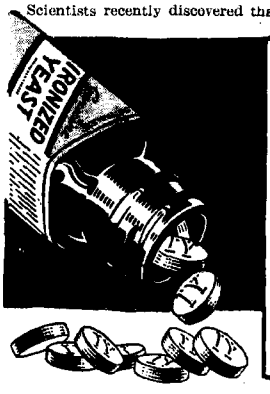

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